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DKR

The **UK racer** destined to leave
Mario Kart in its **slipstream**



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Yes, yet another Nintendo 64 game on the cover of **Edge**, and yet another outstanding game from Rare. If any company has the golden touch at the moment (amply demonstrated with a certain James Bond license), it is based in a Warwickshire farmhouse. On page 50 **Edge** visits the respected codeshop for an in-depth playtest of *Diddy Kong Racing* – which looks capable of resetting the benchmark for console racing games – but look for a gigantic feature exploring the company and its not-inconsiderable achievements in an issue soon.

This month sees a turning point for the PlayStation's fortunes, at least in terms of receiving software that has been designed specifically for the console rather than the PC or arcade. *Final Fantasy VII* (p84), the mind-bogglingly expansive *Castlevania* (p86) and the stunningly realistic *Gran Turismo* (p56) all show signs that Sony's console could finally be receiving the steady stream of high-quality software it so richly deserves but has been so wanting of in recent months.

In terms of breakthroughs, **Edge** is also responsible for one this month, having brought together six of the videogame industry's most respected players for a free-for-all discussion concerning originality, adult software, artificial intelligence and countless other game-related topics. Each of the individuals involved in the forum are from quite different backgrounds, making for an especially inviting glimpse into their minds and motivations.

This month **Edge** also attended three very different videogame shows – JAMMA, ECTS and the Tokyo Game Show. Covering home and arcade releases, they offered a glimpse of what's just around the corner...

The future is almost here...

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Cover

Diddy Kong Racing © Rare/Nintendo



Diddy Kong Racing

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Clockwise from above: JAMMA, the Tokyo Game show, and ECTS



Levi's 501 promotional game



Creatures on the Net



Tekken anime



Burning Rangers



Half-Life



Barrage



Final Fantasy VII



Castlevania: Symphony of the Night



Rapid Racer



Final Fantasy VII



Baroque



Overblood 2



Final Furlong

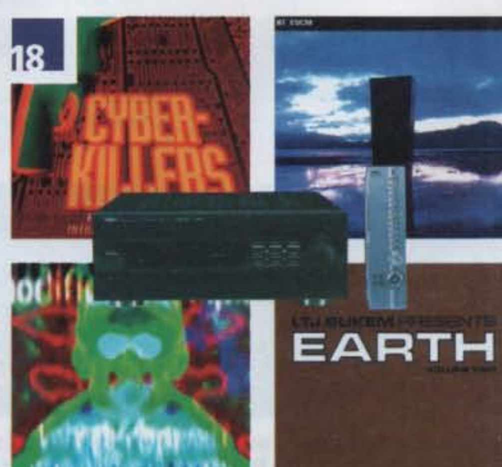


Final Fantasy III



Rolling Thunder (Namco Museum Encore)

regulars



Cutting Edge

The latest news from the world of interactive entertainment

JAMMA: KONAMI STRIKES WITH COBRA









In some ways a disappointment, Konami's Cobra launch relied on *VF3* rival *Fighting Wu-Shu* (left) but not *Racing Jam* to impress delegates. The latter was saved for the company's lower-priced and lower-specced Hornet board (above) while *Wu-Shu* fell short on both playability and quality-of-animation counts

For Japan's hardcore gaming fanatics (and let's face it, there's a seriously high number), it is possible to attend a gaming-related event almost every week. But while the majority offer little but introverted niches of current gaming phenomena, it's the biggest biannual trade-only events where videogaming's future trends are revealed.

JAMMA (or the Amusement Machine Show to give it its full, proper title) takes place six months after its February equivalent (the AOU) and still generates arguably the greatest buzz in the gaming industry, acting as a technological catalyst for all coin-operated videogames.

The 35th show took place just as **Edge** went to press and saw Sega once again reasserting its market dominance with a self-assured sweep across the board.

This was to be the show where Namco and Konami would leapfrog Sega's Model 3 benchmark, but it didn't happen. Konami's Cobra project – revealed on video six months ago at the AOU – materialised in a form that left Sega executives breathing a sigh of relief, while Namco held back yet again from making an announcement regarding its massively delayed System 33 project – no doubt to the glee of Sega executives revelling in the continued supremacy of Model 3.

Konami's Cobra *did* see the light of day at JAMMA but curiously it was only used to demonstrate the *VF3* rival, *Fighting Wu-Shu*. Strangely enough, while amazingly rich in scenic detail and advanced 3D effects, Konami's bid for the 3D throne was let down by rather a clumsy control system and disappointing motion-captured animation which lacks the fluidity of *VF3*. First impressions of Cobra are dazzling but under close examination detail appears to be lower than Sega's board, with less attention paid to the faces and hands of the characters, for example. It was also uninspiring to see some blatant plagiarism of *VF3*'s backdrops, with bouts taking place on top of buildings and by a shoreline, for example. The incredible depth of field conveyed by the Hong Kong stage is a sight to behold, however.









From left: Konami's *Fighting Wu-Shu* easily has some of the best environments ever seen, but is let down slightly by unconvincing motion capture; its other Cobra game, *Racing Jam*, has been ported to Hornet, a lower end board; the imaginatively titled *Water Ski* (Sega); and the ST-V-based *Winter Heat* (Sega)



The Cobra version of *Racing Jam* only made a fleeting appearance at the show on a video tape running on a curved monitor (far left). This deluxe version is rumoured to be experiencing development difficulties. The company also presented *Beatmania*, the first game based on – get this – DJ mixing (far right)

The awesome-looking *Racing Jam* failed to appear as a Cobra title at JAMMA, having instead been ported to the company's Hornet board (a mid-range-spec board previously used to power *Hang Pilot*). A full Cobra version is being saved for a deluxe format with a curved screen – something that revealed on Konami's stand, which was running the same video of the game as premiered at the AOU show (and included on **Edge**'s CD1 – see **E**47). Apparently a single-player cabinet will be marketed at ¥2,600,000 (approx £13,500) and will be targeted at state-of-the-art game centres almost exclusively. The game itself offers the kind of options and gameplay features normally found in a console title, and delegates drew comparisons with *GTi Club*.

So, in the high-end field at least, it was left to Sega to steal the show with what was largely considered to be the most impressive game on display – its Model 3-powered *Virtual-On Oratorio Tangram*.

While the original title was produced by AM3, the responsibility of the sequel has fallen to sister team AM2 following the game's producer defecting from AM3 to AM2. The original *Virtual-On* is still a popular game in Japan and the elevated importance of this title must surely have been a consideration in the change of staff.

Scud Race Plus, another sequel from AM2, sees a bizarre spin on the original Model 3 game with 'Toy Story'-style comedy characters (including a rocket car, bus, tank, and, perhaps most ridiculously, giant cat) to a game that now features a new beginners course, a mirror mode and even a 'bowling' track.

More Model 3 extravagance could be found in *Get Bass* – what is surely set to become one of the most popular fishing games in Japan (yes, this is no one-off) – and *Virtua Fighter 3 Team Battle*, the latest version of the landmark fighting game sporting a host of improvements way beyond the kind of revisions that were made to the *VF2* series. This new version features an improved camera system, three-on-three battles and extensions to some of the game's settings.

Following the success of its *Wave Runner* coin-op, AM1 introduced two ski-based games during the show using similar

It was left to Sega to steal the show with what was largely considered to be the most impressive game – *Virtual-On Oratoria Tangram*, a Model 3-powered extravaganza

cabinets. *Water Ski* uses Model 2 for its visuals, offering gameplay focusing on stunts, while *Ski Champ* represents Model 3-powered skiing with incredible visuals, generating perhaps the biggest buzz at the show after the spectacular *Virtual-On* sequel.

Meanwhile AM3 continued to show its *Le Mans 24h* (**E**48), as well as *Winter Heat* on the Saturn-based ST-V board. The latter may lack the official Nagano winter Olympics license (which Konami snapped up a while ago), but still impresses with its *Decathlete*-style play. Players can choose from eight sports including speed-skiing, ski jumping, alpine downhill racing, slalom, and a bobsleigh, among others. ▶



Model 3 games from Sega featured highly at JAMMA (from left): *Virtua Fighter Team Battle* introduced a multitude of new features; *The Lost World* has been redesigned too and now plays in a huge deluxe cabinet; *Get Bass* wins the trophy for best fishing game, while *Scud Race Plus* is, well, similarly odd





One of the most entertaining games of the show was Namco's *Rapid River* (above) which requires players to paddle frantically through a series of fantastical environments – in a rubber dinghy. The company's only new technology was its System 23 board, running the excellent *Motocross Go!* (above)

◀ Finally, concluding the Model 3 showcase at JAMMA was a deluxe version of *The Lost World* with scenes more in line with the movie's (admittedly limited) plot.

Still hogging second place in the coin-op arena, Namco may have failed to silence the sceptics yet again with its conspicuous lack of any new high-end coin-op technology, but the company did unveil a new board – System 23. However, this amounted to little more than a souped-up System 22 IG, with no especially evident leap in performance.

Namco's second major title at JAMMA was *Rapid River*. With a dedicated cabinet and playing rather like a polygonal *Toobin'*, the coin-op sees players paddling along rapids in a rubber boat

The game chosen to showcase it was *Motocross Go!*, a bike game designed by the team behind *Suzuka 8 Hours* and *Cyber Cycles*, and at least it afforded players some interesting gameplay, as well as four-player link-up and a great force-feedback system.

Namco's second major title at JAMMA was *Rapid River*. Using a dedicated, elaborate cabinet and playing rather like a 3D version of the classic Atari coin-op *Toobin'*, the coin-op sees players paddling along rapids in a rubber boat. Participants are actually required to physically paddle, too, resulting in an experience that has possibly been targeted at couples looking for a fun and unusual coin-op experience (which it most certainly is).

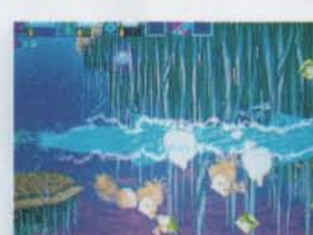
Beat 'em up fans were spoilt for choice at JAMMA, with Capcom introducing the first of what will no doubt be a slew of *Street Fighter III* updates, as well as an impressive new System 12-powered game, *Rival Schools*. Meanwhile, Taito revealed the first evidence of its collaboration with 3Dfx with the impressive *Psychic Force 2*, running on its Wolf board. But it was Namco's latest, *Ehrgeiz*, that attracted the most punters. Designed by Dream Factory, the team behind SquareSoft's *Tobal* series on the PlayStation (the team leader was part of the original *Tekken* design team), *Ehrgeiz* uses almost exactly the same gameplay system as *Tobal*, although an escape-style button is implemented, too. Only four characters were playable during the show, but it was clear that Square's title possesses some original features that should throw the most contrived beat 'em ups form rival companies into sharp relief. As well as close combat, bouts can take place at a distance, with fighters hurling projectiles and making use of interactive backdrops, some of which being on multiple levels.

Due to the astonishing success of *Tekken 3* in Japan (where it remained the most popular coin-op for months), much was made of *Ehrgeiz*'s System 12-based technology and the potential for a future PlayStation conversion. In some respects Namco's presence at JAMMA signalled a shift from pursuing high-end visualisation to marrying low-end technology with gameplay innovation. Hopefully this is a combination that will win fans in both sectors and establish a future trend. **E**









From left: *Moto Raid* impressed with its speedy Model 2 visuals; *Rival Schools*, running on a System 12-style board, should be PlayStation-bound along with *Street Fighter III* update *Second Impact*; Taito's *Darius 2+* uses polygons in a side-on perspective but was one of only a handful of shooters at JAMMA





Sega's *Virtual-On Oratorio Tangram* (top) boasted the best Model 3 visual but direct-screen photography was strictly prohibited. SNK's *Round Trip RV* (above)



Ski Champ is possibly AM1's best achievement to date, with some of the most amazing visuals yet, courtesy of the Model 3 board







Capcom seems content to continue adding titles to its stable of beat 'em ups, although it failed to seriously rival the efforts of Sega, Namco and Konami. Meanwhile, Namco (centre, right) scored with *Ehrgeiz*









From left: *Off Road Challenge* marked Midway's attendance at JAMMA – the only foreign coin-op company exhibiting at the show; Namco impressed with Square's highly playable and original System 12 game *Ehrgeiz*, as well as its own System 23-powered *Motocross Go!* and System 12 title *Libero Grande*

TOKYO GAME SHOW ENERGISES 32BIT SCENE







Most of the major players were in attendance – except Nintendo which was, as ever, holding back for Shoshinkai



***Gran Turismo*'s impressive blend of detailed graphics and realistic handling was almost enough to divert attention from Sony's denuded launch schedule – perhaps the company shouldn't have bothered with the real-life rally car**

The Tokyo Game Show is the biggest event in the Japanese videogames calendar, although the venue this time – the Makuhari Messe convention centre – is an hour's train ride from the city centre. If the organisers push it much further out, they'll have to call it something else.

While the show's relatively low 14,365 attendance figure for the first day (open to the press and industry only) gave the impression of scarcely populated event, 52,834 members of the public squeezed in on the second day. On the third, queues stretched as far back as the local railway station (over half a mile away), with 73,431 punters eventually gaining access.

Unlike E3, where emphasis is placed on hardware and technology as well as games, Japan's largest videogame show focuses on software. With plenty of stock on view, companies utilise all the visual chicanery at their disposal – pulsating spotlights, large stands and maxed-out music – to snatch attention away from the competition.

















Clockwise from top left: *Legend of the Seven Winds* (Saturn), Capcom's *Biohazard 2* aka *Resident Evil 2* (PlayStation), Namco's *Kronoa* (PlayStation) which joins the increasing number of sideview polygon platformers, Sonic Team's *Burning Rangers* (Saturn), Nihon System Supply's cutesy *Chameleon Twist* (Nintendo 64), isometric strategy war game *Culdcept* (Saturn), HudsonSoft's *Baku Bomberman* (Nintendo 64), and Riverhill Soft's *Overblood 2* (PlayStation)

This September was no different, with the majority of publishers trumpeting their Christmas line-ups. Of some 500 games on display, almost half were for the PlayStation. The Saturn's presence was muted in comparison, but far more surprising was the minority status accorded to the PC and N64. And to add insult to inequality, the vast majority of games were sequels.

Sony surprised many onlookers with *Gran Turismo* (see p56), a driving simulation featuring 87 cars from ten manufacturers including Honda, Toyota, Aston Martin and TVR. Boasting detailed graphics, beautifully realistic handling and an impressively executed replay mode, the game deservedly drew plenty of attention from the public.

Continuing the racing theme, a Japanese version of *F1* brought the range of Sony's new announcements to an end. Ordinarily the company's apparent lack of new software would have caused some disillusionment, but the quality and potential of *Gran Turismo* served to ameliorate the situation.

Next to Sony stood SquareSoft's stand, which turned out to be one of the show's best. Apart from *Front Mission Alternative* and *Front Mission 2*, the master of the RPG displayed a playable *Einhander* together with two new RPGs, *Xenogear* and *Chocobo's Mystery Dungeon*. The latter is based on Chunsoft's popular *Siren Mystery Dungeon* but features *FF*'s friendly creature as the lead character. Other than that, gameplay seems to have remained the same. *Xenogears*, on the other hand, is very much in the *Final Fantasy* mould – but although it features polygonal battle sequences, it's less graphically ambitious than that series' last instalment.







Although first-day attendance figures were relatively good considering the fact the show was closed to the public, the amount of visitors on the following two days was remarkable, and up from last year's attendance. Many of the showgoers queued for hours in order to catch a glimpse, and hopefully a play, of the titles due for this Christmas

Square also showcased *Soukaigi*, a title seemingly inspired by *Bushido Blade*. Fights will take place in a futuristic world mixing traditional and contemporary Japanese artifacts. Players can choose one of 16 characters, and Square has placed considerable emphasis on the adventure side of the proceedings.

Disappointingly, one of the most promising Square titles, the *Resident Evil*-alike *Parasite Eve* (see p40), was only shown in video form, albeit on a huge screen suspended from the roof.

Sega showcased that rarest of things – a new title that manages to incorporate some element of originality. *Burning Rangers* (see p32) is a search-and-rescue affair set in the future in which players form part of a crack firefighting squad. It's being developed by Sega's Sonic Team, and Yuji Naka himself introduced it at the show. Unfortunately, trawling through the rest of Sega's stand uncovered no

















Clockwise from top left: *Tamagotchi World* (Nintendo 64) triggers the next phase of pet-related hysteria, Tecmo's *Gallop Racer 2* (PlayStation), Enix's *Astronika* (PlayStation), Whoopee Camp's promising platform romp *Tonpa* (PlayStation, two shots), Imagineer's *Fighting Cup* (Nintendo 64), Bandai's oddly titled *The Mystery Hospital* (PlayStation) which owes much to Warp's *The D*, Enix's *Bust a Move* (PlayStation), and HudsonSoft's *Bloody Roar* (PlayStation)



The Saturn was reasonably supported, with 26.2 per cent of the total titles shown. With *Burning Rangers*, Sega proved that it can still push the Saturn

more surprises. *Shining Force III*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, *Sonic R* and *Sega Touring Car Championship* were all on display, but predictably *Virtua Fighter 3* wasn't.

Another hotly anticpated title that failed to put in an appearance was the PlayStation version of *Tekken 3*, although the show brochure resolutely insisted otherwise. The conversion is thought to be taking longer because of the game's System 12 board origins (the first two *Tekken*s having used System 11). Nevertheless, according to sources, *Tekken 3* is still expected to hit its Japanese deadline in December.

Another hotly anticipated title that failed to put in an appearance was the PlayStation version of *Tekken 3*, although the show brochure resolutely insisted otherwise

In an effort to mollify the masses, Namco showed *Kronoa*, *Namco Museum Encore* (including *Rolling Thunder* and *Sky Kid*), and its first N64 project, *Famista 64*. The latter looked quite impressive – for a baseball game.

With Nintendo failing to appear, as is its custom at the TGS, it was left to thirdparty companies to demonstrate the N64's prodigious talents. Two of the most promising were Seta's *Rev Limit* (Seta was also showing *Wild Choppers*, due for a November release in Japan), and a near-complete *Top Gear Rally* from Kemco (see p36).

In the N64 beat 'em up arena, Culture Brain's *Virtual Hiryu no Ken* (see p46) and *Fighting Cup* from Imagineer were the only contenders. The latter features a novel scoring system where each move is worth a certain amount of points, the first player to reach the required nine points winning the match. Imagineer could only show an early version, and as such the graphics were unimpressive, although the gameplay may buck the beat 'em up trend in rewarding a more strategic approach.

Imagineer's other forthcoming release, *Environmental Tale*, bears a strong resemblance to *Super Mario 64* in terms of perspective and design, but it also features distinctive RPG elements. Players start off in a small town and must build their skills, engage in combat, and acquire new spells in order to complete a series of quests. The version at the show was 60 per cent complete, and Imagineer was sanguine about its prospects for a Christmas release in Japan, with possible western versions once a translation is complete.

One of the biggest disappointments of the show was the absence of a playable version of *Metal Gear Solid* on Konami's stand. Again the game was shown in running video form, but this was essentially the same as the version shown at ECTS, and Konami was unable to commit to a release date. *Hyper Olympics in Nagano 98* for the PlayStation and N64 was the most prominent title on the stand, although there was a playable version of *Gasp!!*, a typical Japanese beat 'em up. This was still at an embryonic stage, with only three characters and two levels (a temple and a park) available. *Hybrid Heaven* was more impressive, but as at E3, it was only shown on video.

Capcom could not be beaten for production values. Hosts dressed as Chris, Claire and Jill greeted visitors entering the *Biohazard 2* theatre for a special presentation of the stand's biggest attraction. Inside, scantily clad Capcom attendants showed viewers their seats, before a dry-ice machine engulfed the red-lit room in smoke. The demo itself showed off the game's vast array of new weaponry and enemies to great effect. The apparent support of head tracking for the main characters raised a few eyebrows, too; running past a zombie will cause the player's character to turn their head in order to keep an eye on the creature, adding to the realism. Capcom's other offerings were old favourites, comprising several titles based on the *Rockman* and *Street Fighter* series. PlayStation fans of the



Clockwise from top left: SCEI's *Gran Turismo* (PlayStation), Taito's *Densha Da Go Go* (PlayStation), SquareSoft's *Chocobo's Mystery Dungeon* (PlayStation), Artdink's balloon game *Notham no Kaze* (PlayStation), SquareSoft's *Xenogears* (PlayStation), and *Parasite Eve* (PlayStation), Enix's splendid dancing game *Bust a Move* (PlayStation) a kind of *Parappa the Rappa* with polygons, and Square's *Bushido Blade*-inspired RPG/beat 'em up *Soukaigi* (PlayStation)

former were certainly catered for with *Rockman Dash*, *Rockman Battle* and *Chase*, *Rockman 8*, *Rockman X4*, and *Rockman Adventures*. Beat 'em up antics were assured with PlayStation and Saturn versions of *Street Fighter Collection*, while *X-Men vs Street Fighter* kept Saturn owners happy.

Hudson pulled a couple of its own surprises with two new *Bomberman* titles: *Bomberman 2* for the Saturn, and the oddly monikered *PlayBomberman* for the PlayStation. The latter retains the classic 2D gameplay but views it from an isometric perspective to give a 3D effect (it was overshadowed by *Bomberman 64* which obviously adds a true third dimension). Further support for the N64 came in the form of *Last Legion*, but it was *Bloody Roar*, a PlayStation fighting game, that attracted the most attention. *Bloody Roar* combatants have the ability to metamorphose into monsters in order to perform special attacks; however, the simplicity of the controls would indicate Hudson is targeting a younger audience.



With titles such as *Parasite Eve*, *Einhander*, *Xenogears*, and the two *Front Mission* games, SquareSoft's stand was one of the show's better examples. Capcom, however, hit back with its *Biohazard 2* theatre presentation, which warned easily disturbed individuals or those with weak hearts to refrain from entering the popular booth (inset)

Sadly, most of the other stands were populated by unexciting clones. SNK's effort, with its proliferation of *King Of Fighters* and *Samurai Spirits* sequels, was particularly disappointing.

As far as surprise announcements were concerned, it was perhaps predictably left to the flamboyant Kenji Eno to engage in his usual theatrical antics. As the first 'Creator's Conference' (which also featured Konami's Hideo Kojima and Sega's Yuji Naka) drew to a close, conference hosts Masaaki Tsukada and Kouichi Hamamura – chief editors of *Dengeki-oh* and *Weekly Famitsu* – asked Eno if he had anything else to report to the public. Eno duly announced that he was currently hard at work on *D2* for the Saturn, and held up a napkin with 'Sega Saturn' written on it as if to reinforce the message. He declined to confirm a release date, however.

So yet another Tokyo Game Show came to an end. Despite the embarrassing paucity of innovative titles, some of the sequels – despite their obvious influences – looked promising. The whole atmosphere reflected a healthy (albeit uninspired) industry, but the glaring absence of a certain major player was felt by anyone visiting the show. *Zelda 64*, *F-Zero 64* and *Yoshi's Story* would certainly have made worthy additions.



Almost every one of the show's substantial number of exhibitors had its own collection of either scantily clad or stupidly dressed dancers, but while most displays had little to do with the games they were promoting, Enix's *Parappa the Rappa*-styled *Bust a Move* at least benefited from having its gameplay illustrated live on stage. Unlike presentations at E3 or ECTS, the ones here had the advantage of being in Japan, which made such behaviour acceptable...







This year's ECTS was more like an American show than any that had preceded it, with the most comprehensive range of software available to play (main), and the most diverse motley crew of hired help (top right and right)







Influenced by this year's E3, the exhibitors at ECTS presented plenty of flesh willing to be pressed. No, Edge didn't indulge

and Activision with *Pitfall 3D*. Finally, Ocean pitted its intelligent, avant garde adventure *OutCast* directly against *Tomb Raider 2* by comparing technical attributes on the first page of its glossy publicity brochure. It seems the only aspect of Core's game that Ocean can't compete with are those oversized polygon mammaries – which in the current babe-obsessed climate is enough to secure its downfall.

And of course there were those PC favourites, the military strategy sim and the first person shoot 'em up, in abundance. Representing the former were, among many others, Eidos' beautiful-looking medieval war-and-resource-management title *Plague*, Bullfrog's visually revitalised *Populous 3*, Sid Meier's complex and realistic *Gettysburg*, and Corrosive Software's *Assault Korps*, which was inexplicably hidden away in a shed at the back of the Eidos megaplex. Visitors could take their pick from *Doom* derivatives *Quake 2*, *Hexen 2*, *SiN*, *Daikatana*, *Forsaken*, *Turok* (an excellent 3Dfx conversion), *Shadow Warrior* or *Blood* – some of which toyed with the genre's shackles without actually breaking them.

Strangely, however, the beat 'em up and racing genres – usually ubiquitous – were under-represented here. Capcom's *Marvel Super Heroes* was the only top-rate fighter present, whereas the title of most promising driving game could fall to either Sierra's *Grand Prix Legends* (a lusciously realistic simulation of the legendary 1967 F1 season) or Gremlin's *Buggy* (a purposefully unrealistic remote-controlled cars affair) depending on your temperament.

Among the mass of football sims, hockey sims, tennis sims and basketball sims, Gremlin's *Actua Soccer 2* (intuitive interface, plentiful camera views) and Konami's *Nagano '98* (promising Winter Olympics action) were prominent.

Sparks of originality? DMA's *Grand Theft Auto* attracted huge amounts of attention, along with the PlayStation puzzler *Kula Quest* and Konami's arena-based fourplayer romp *Poy Poy*. These were, however, mere blips on an otherwise formulaic non-event horizon.

For a show attended by all the major players, exhibiting dozens of games each, there were very few surprises. *Tomb Raider II* was clearly the major attraction of the show, while *Resident Evil 2* and *Final Fantasy VII* drew gamers keen for their first taste of two long-awaited titles. Perhaps the most notable factor, however, was the continuing dominance of the PlayStation in the console sector. Now over three years old, the machine shows no signs of relinquishing its grip on the industry, despite strong competition from Nintendo. With Saturn and PlayStation sequels not expected until the end of '98 at the earliest, it looks as though this situation will remain at least until next year's show. Perhaps developers will use this extended lifespan to explore some new gameplay ideas on the machine instead of recycling popular genres in ever more strained incarnations. Stranger things have happened.

Although their presence at ECTS was vital, many of the top game companies neglected to preview any important new titles at the European show. Nintendo – tucked away in the much smaller National hall – was still showing off *Mario Kart* to a non-plussed populace, as well as the slightly fresher *Lylat Wars* and *Blast Corps*. With no *Banjo-Kazooie* or *Body Harvest* present, Rare's *GoldenEye* was the only 'new' game to speak of.

Psygnosis and Activision, too, were content to stick with their E3 goodies. *G-Police*, *Overboard* and *Psybadek* from the former and *Quake 2*, *Hexen 2* and *SiN* from the latter all look promising (as they did in May), but a couple of genuine unveilings would have spiced up the show no end. E



Certain show-goers found that the amount of time they spent playing games turned their bodies a colour apparently attractive to members of the opposite sex. So it's true then: videogames are good for you...

(out there)

REPORTAGE FROM THE PERIPHERY OF THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY

Kung-fu klobber

Continuing its retro image campaign in an attempt to keep its kudos in the face of ever-increasing competition, Levi's is moving into the videogame market. Well, perhaps not, but the jeans giant did commission Anti-Rom to come up with *Laundry Master*, a PC/Mac-compatible beat 'em up used as a promotional device to accompany the kung-fu-themed cinema advert.

To say the controls are basic would be to severely understate matters, with players only able to jump, block, punch and kick their way through six levels of side-scrolling martial arts action. Each level is made up of three sections, the third being devoted to a boss character (which include a Chinese dragon and a disgruntled chef. The settings for the levels are based around those of the advert, so fights take place in streets, Chinese restaurants, and rooftops, all with very little sense of depth.

Perhaps predictably then, graphics are circa '85 at best, with at least two frames of animation per move for each of the decidedly 2D characters, while the sluggish, unresponsive nature of the controls should be enough to drive players back to engage in boardgame-related activities. Suffice it to say, Data East's ancient *Kung-Fu Master* could easily high-kick it back to gameplay school.







Dolphin friendly



Jumping very obviously onto the Tamagotchi bandwagon, Fujitsu is releasing Fin Fin, a half dolphin, half bird, totally useless exercise in artificial life for the PC. Fin Fin lives on the Magic Planet of Teo where he dives for fish, bathes, performs acrobatics or sits down for a meal of Lemo Fruit.

Supposedly costing a ludicrous $70bn to develop, Fin Fin is based on the world's most advanced artificial life technology. He has feelings, brains, an individual character and will react to his owner, responding to friendly and unfriendly behaviour as well as his surroundings. Unfortunately, he does not die should you leave him alone for long periods of time, although with luck he might develop behavioural problems.

According to its maker, Fin Fin is already a cult hit in America and Japan. Now, warning signs don't come any clearer than that…

Actua Super Furries

About a month and a half ago (by the time you read this), **Edge** received a call from a music video producer wanting to find out which was the hottest brand of football game in the UK, as he wanted to use footage from it in the video for 'Play It Cool', the new release from top taffies the Super Furry Animals. **Edge** pointed him in the direction of Gremlin and its Actua brand and the result was a frenzied long weekend's work involving scanning the features of the band members and actually working them into the game.

Thus lead vocalist Gruff Rhys and his cronies appear in an *Actua Soccer 2* match against Brazil (which they go on to win 4-3) in the video.

Fans of the Super Furries will be intrigued to learn that the band will appear as a hidden team in *Actua Soccer 2*, due for release in November.





Skin trade

Upon opening a recent issue of industry paper *Computer Trade Weekly*, **Edge** was surprised to witness an unusually enormous amount of promotional paraphernalia drop out. Even more unusual was the nature of one particular item of 'advertising' merchandise – these, ahem, king-size rolling papers (below).

Created to promote Virgin's White Label (its budget range), the packaging is emblazoned with the legends 'GAMERS GEAR' (sic) and 'EXTRA LENGTH FOR A QUALITY HIGH'. Just what is Virgin saying? Has the games industry really gone to pot?



EDGE SINGLES OUT THE WINNERS AND LOSERS IN THE INTERMINABLE BATTLE FOR VIDEOGAME CRED

(game on)

Virgin, **Ocean** and **Interplay** (aka BLT – Bizarre Love Triangle) for organising the best after-show ECTS party **Edge** has attended in years. Great people, free booze all night, a 4am finish – *excellent*.

Sega, for continuing to plug away in the face of adversity, and proving that there's life in the old dog yet by announcing original titles such as *Burning Rangers*. **Edge** gets the feeling that the Japanese hardware and software specialist isn't finished yet…

Project X (again): only **Edge** knows what's really going on…

Edge, for finally managing to get shot of Simon 'Councillor' Cox.

The **Cobra** board. What happened? Konami missed a very valuable opportunity at JAMMA to get one over on Sega. Doh.

The 37-year-old 'actor' **Edge** knows only as '**Mr Thompson**' who, after being given the push from his role as Tinky Winky in kids TV show 'Teletubbies' took on the role of Fin Fin (see opposite page) for promotional duties, declaring, 'Being Fin Fin is like playing Hamlet compared to being a Teletubby.' *Jeeesus…*

Sony, for the shambolic mess that its ECTS party represented. Despite the fact that Future Publishing sponsored one of the bars at the event, **Edge**'s staff were left out in the cold. Pathetic.

(game over)

VIDEOGAMES ON THE EDGE

The games – old, new, whatever – that have brought work to a standstill in the Edge office this month

Castlevania: Symphony of the Night (PlayStation)
One of the biggest platform games ever conceived, packed with surprises, great weapons, some fantastic music, and a collection of the foulest foes **Edge** has seen in a long while.

Final Fantasy VII (PlayStation)
SquareSoft proves that it can work its magic on the 32bit scene as remarkably as it did on 8 and 16bit. Console RPGs don't get much better than this. And what great use of CD-ROM.

Gran Turismo (PlayStation, demo version)
Edge has been privy to a one-track demo version of Sony's super-slick motor-racing extravaganza for a while now, and few here can resist its graphical and gameplay allure.

Grand Theft Auto (PC 3Dfx)
Still the most-played PC game in the **Edge** office. Expect the final verdict next month…

GoldenEye (Nintendo 64)
Set to be one of the most popular thirdparty N64 releases to date, this Rare-developed movie licence amazes, especially in sniper mode. Truly a groundbreaking product.

nuMedia

A meeting point for media capitalising on the digital entertainment revolution

in association with ocean

No 19

CD-ROM

Chillas

As with *FrEQuency* – Modified's previous music package (**E**33) – you don't have to be a sequencing software veteran to generate a tasty smorgasbord of morphing sounds and achingly post-modern visuals from *Chillas*. Unlike *FrEQuency*, though, you also don't have to be a computing whizz. The latest sound-to-light effort from Bath-based hipsters Modified is infinitely more polished than its predecessor, both in terms of installation and interface. It has clearly demarcated house, hip-hop (encompassing trip-hop) and drum'n'bass sections, and thanks to the new, super-easy eight-track mixer, plus an unfeasibly huge bank of samples and drum loops, this is the easiest means yet witnessed of constructing your own tracks from diverse building blocks.

The samples and loops should keep lovers of any type of dance music satisfied, and are classy enough both to let you perform your own genre-busting experiments and to wish that Modified would get their plans to launch a record label off the ground. As ever, you can also customise Modified's visuals with all manner of transition effects yourself, or import your own bitmaps and sounds. So, *Chillas* doesn't really offer anything ground-breaking that *FrEQuency* didn't have, but does everything that FrEQuency did much, much better. The best chill-out CD-ROM on the market.







- Published by Modified
- Developed in-house
- £16
- Out now, PC/Mac

Music Maker 3.0

The latest version of Magix's surprisingly easy-to-use but full-featured electronic music arranger/sequencer program rather gratuitously adds video editing to its already impressive range of abilities. But surely these will be ignored in favour of the package's core functionality as a near-professional electronic music creator with a very sensible price. As ever, it comes with an enormous bank of samples and loops, but this time the Euro-cheesiness that dogged previous iterations of *Music Maker* (Magix is a German company) have thankfully been avoided.

Budding bedroom boffins who know their way around a PC should head straight for *Music Maker 3.0* if they're not willing to remortgage their house for a copy of *CuBase* (or blag a dodgy copy of that excellent but overpriced sequencer), as it really does contain all you need in order to construct at least demo-quality tracks with just a PC, a keyboard and a fistful of samples.

The roster of digital effects is bigger and more useful than ever, which is extremely convenient if you're into pinching samples and messing them up to avoid litigation. Equipment demands are pretty low (it'll operate on a cheapo 486) and, all in all, it beats all the other contenders for the 'My First Sequencer' crown hands-down.



- Published by Magix
- Developed in-house
- £40
- Out now, PC

Music

Earth Volume Two

LTJ Bukem

Good Looking Records



LTJ Bukem collaborates once again with a swarm of breakbeat and drum'n'bass producers to present the second installment to the 'Earth' series. In slight contrast to volume one, this collection adopts a much more intelligent, subdued feel, the trend setter being Bukem's fusion of rolling, ambient breakbeat 'Cosmic Interlude' followed by similar, spotlessly produced donations 'Silver Dawn' by Artemis and 'Adrift On Deep Water' by Blu Mar Ten. Volume two is a very strong representation of the diverse capabilities from a wide selection of producers on the Good Looking Records roster.

A Strong Unit

Kitachi

Dope on Plastic



'A Strong Unit' represents a complex twist on breakbeat dub that has already conjured up its own dance genre that has been termed 'Reggaedubhiptechhop'. The album delivers 15 extraordinary tracks ranging from the slow-burning easy groove of 'Realms of Dub' to the heavy hip-hop breaks of the currently available singles 'Scratch', 'Heavyweight' and 'Spirit', their most recent release remixed by Roni Size and Aloof.

Kitachi have succeeded in developing an accomplished release that is incomparable to anything else around, and one that may serve as a source of influence to many.

Gadgets

Definitive Technology Speaker System

Anyone serious about surround sound knows that only a system built out of separate units is able to successfully compete with the experience offered by today's purpose-built cinemas.

This has led to countless relationship-shattering arguments as partners have objected to having their living-room space invaded by numerous black boxes and a quintet of speakers. Nevertheless, if determined that your humble abode should double as the road's local multiplex featuring Pro-Logic and – more importantly – Dolby Digital sound, then mere speakers will not suffice.

This is where the £1,790 US brand Definitive Technology speaker package steps in. There are more expensive set ups available, of course, but the system's BP8 front speakers, the C-1 centre, and the BP1 surrounds should satisfy most AV enthusiasts. And with a 22Hz-30kHz frequency response for the main front channels, and power handling figure of 200W, the Def Techs should also easily annoy the neighbours.

It is generally accepted that for Dolby Digital a bipolar design is preferable, and it's a feature Definitive Technology incorporates into its speakers. This simply means that an equal output is sent to the front and rear of the cabinet, adding texture and reflection to the sound, which in a home cinema environment results in a better integration of the system with its surroundings.

Partnering this system with a substantial amplifier reveals a wide, dynamic soundstage, capable of transforming even the most banal Hollywood offering into an exciting and involving ear-bashing.



● AC-3 Integrated	● £850
● Yamaha	● Out now

Speaker System, Mafia Trading Company, tel: 01794 519599

Philips 32PW9763

Philips' latest 32-inch widescreen set, the 32PW9763, not only features digital picture enhancement (meaning that it can 'clean up' images) but it also has dual tuners. That means that the screen can be split down the middle allowing you to watch two channels simultaneously, or TV on one channel and use the other for a console (or, best of all, two consoles linked up).

Pricy at £1,900, maybe, but worth it to end TV-related quarrels, and it has full Dolby Pro Logic.

32PW9763, Philips, tel: 0181 689 4444



● 32PW9763	● £1,900
● Philips	● Out now

Yamaha DSP A1092



During its infancy, the early-'90s home cinema phenomenon naturally encompassed the movie industry. By comparison, the videogame industry was relatively slow to catch up, but several developers recognised the benefits of an involving soundtrack, and over the years an increasing number of titles have emerged sporting Dolby Surround sound audio options, and more recently games such as Psygnosis' *F1* have supported the more comprehensive four channel (five speaker) Pro Logic version.

However, the ever-advancing world of home theatre is now beginning to accept a new standard – Dolby Digital: an eight-speaker, full-bandwidth, six-discrete-channel setup (also known as AC-3 in the States). Logic dictates that videogames will continue their chase, and future consoles incorporating DVD technology will presumably carry compatible soundtracks. Which makes the emerging AC-3 technology highly exciting to gamers who care about the aural as well as visual experience.

Yamaha, which was quick off the mark with the UK's first Dolby Digital integrated amplifier last year, has recently introduced an additional model, the DSP-A1092. At £850, this is currently the cheapest such unit on the market, and offers 80W RMS output on all main channels, plus an additional 25W for the front effects. The unit is very much aimed at DVD users, and as such does not include an RF input, meaning laserdisc owners wishing to play their NTSC Dolby Digital collection will have to invest in a separate external demodulator (Yamaha's own £100 APD1 is surprisingly good value).

Despite the necessary cuts, the DSP-A1092 continues Yamaha's renowned pedigree in the home cinema sector, with excellent warmth and depth, fine definition and a wide soundstage from both music and movies. As such it deserves serious consideration from anyone entering the digital era.

● AC-3 Integrated Amp	● £850
● Yamaha	● Out now

DSP-A1092, Yamaha, tel: 01923 233166

ESCM
BT
Perfecto



For all its pomposity, Brian Transeau's 'Ima' was a memorable debut – a beautifully organic soundscape that crashed, washed, and lapped like a tropical sea. 'ESCM' largely rejects this epic vision and represents a collision course for myriad styles. High points include the acid electro breakbeat of 'Orbitus Terranium', the fluffy trance anthem 'Flaming June' and, best of all, 'Nectar' – multi-layered trancey pop with a male vocal and a New Order-style guitar bassline. It doesn't all work, but when it does, 'ESCM' occasionally blinds with its musical craftsmanship.

Wave Breaks
Salt Tank
FFRR



Salt Tank's previous album, 'Science and Nature', was a great collection of tunes, effectively stamping the duo's melodic trance trademark with aplomb.

'Wave Breaks' is mostly lodged in breakbeat territory and it's the newer jungle influences illustrated by tracks such as 'Da Blues' and 'C Jax' that show Gates and Stanners attempting to charm more than just four-four fanatics. By comparison, pumping trancers such as 'Wave Intruder' and 'Badlands' sound a bit stale, while the Bobby Miles-esque 'Angels Landing' is, quite frankly, utter tosh.

Gadgets

Net 2000 SpaceStation

The ability to surf the Internet using just a standard television and a set-top box is an idea that's catching on, with more and more Internet units now being released for those who can't afford, or simply don't want, a computer. The latest, the Net2000 SpaceStation is, under its hi-fi-component-like skin, little more than a fairly basic PC with a modem and a VGA-to-RGB converter so the picture is viewable on your telly. The results aren't ideal, for the unfortunate viewer is forced to suffer slightly fuzzy graphics (due to the comparatively low-res display of TVs) and cramped fonts. However, the SpaceStation is relatively cheap, it's upgradeable, and the infrared keyboard makes it easy to use from the sofa. That is, if it's possible to tempt soap-opera addicts away from the TV long enough to use it.

Net 2000 SpaceStation, available from Software Warehouse, tel: 01675 466467



- **SpaceStation**
- **£500**
- **Net 2000**
- **Available now**

Books

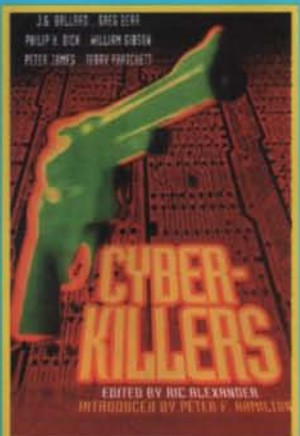
Cyber Killers

- **Edited by Ric Alexander**
- **Orion Publishing**
- **£10**
- **ISBN 0-75280-980-6**

Don't be mislead by the title. This isn't a collection of dodgy short stories given a specious 'cyber' prefix to cash in on the current trend for urban future thrillers. This anthology, split neatly into three themed chapters (Network Terrorists, Robot Crime and Virtual Murder), actually features work by some of the genre's greatest visionaries, providing the reader with a compilation of future crime fiction which is both readable and relevant; especially impressive considering some of the stories date back to the 1950s.

The message these prophetic visions preach – that the technological future we face may be far from the Utopia which has been promised to us – is made even more poignant now as the words are becoming reality. Sci-fi, it seems, often works best when it shows what might be just around the corner – which is exactly what this excellent collection of stories does.

Considering the authors featured here (Alfred Bester, J G Ballard, Robert Sheckley, etc) virtually invented the cyberpunk genre without knowing it, modern proponents have a lot to thank them for. An essential selection.



Hard, Soft and Wet

- **Melanie McGrath**
- **Harper Collins**
- **£17**
- **ISBN 0-00-255586-7**

Virtual travel fiction had to happen sooner or later, but at least the genre gets off to an interesting start with this idiosyncratic journey into global cyberspace. Here, McGrath meets the inhabitants who are shaping the digital youth culture of today: hackers, email junkies, arcade champs, ambient DJs. Any **Edge** reader who thinks they're hooked on videogames should wait until they read about the arcade champs who have turned VR *Battletech* into a religion.

On the most part this is a highly voyeuristic look at this new landscape and the people who make it their home. Whoever she meets and wherever she goes, McGrath tries to make some sort of sense out of what she sees, hears and feels. To her, the information age is new, frightening and challenging all at the same time.

But shot through with raw emotion, this is more than just an information superhighway travelogue. McGrath has managed to capture the personalities driving the digital culture into the mainstream. She has also written an enthralling diary of an outsider gaining access to a new territory, and staking her own claim to part of it.



Music

Modus Operandi
Photek
Science (Virgin)



'Modus Operandi' is the eagerly awaited debut album from Rupert Parkes – aka Photek – probably one of the most diverse, experimental producers in drum'n'bass.

This aptly titled collection of minimalistic techno, jazz, jungle concludes Photek's first chapter by illustrating his diverse interests. 'The Fifth Column' reveals oriental influences, while the dark tones of 'Minotaur' contrast with the intelligent, laidback feel of '124'. Although Photek has been producing for five years, this appears to be a positive step towards more experimentation in the future of drum'n'bass.

Northern Exposure 2
Various
Ministry of Sound



House compilations are more often calculated exercises in commercial gain than true reflections of a DJ's taste and skill. Not so with Sasha and John Digweed's Northern Exposure series, though, which melds tunes of glorious textural quality to form heart-warming mixes with real staying power.

This is almost as good as the original 'NE', the first CD riding a wave of dreamy breakbeat ambience (the glorious combo of Chicane's mix of Furry Phreaks' 'Soothe' and Frontside's 'Dammerung') and the second pursuing slightly less inspiring but pleasingly melodic Euro trance.

netview

EDGE'S EXAMINATION OF THE INTERNET AND ONLINE GAMING SCENE

Creatures alive and **kicking** on the **Net**





Without the rich potential of the Internet, it's difficult to see how *Creatures* could have become such a vibrant genetic experiment

Remember *Creatures*? (**E**37). Despite the winding down of Time Warner's UK games division (which was set to publish the UK edition), the game is going strong across the rest of the world – and has this month been re-released in the UK as a budget title. Indeed, a quick dip into the Internet reveals that much of the original 'gene-swapping' vision has come true.

Creatures is the creation of Cyberlife Technologies. A bold experiment in neural network-based artificial life, *Creatures* casts the player as a god-like presence in the world of the Norns. As independent entities, the Norns roam about their world discovering what to eat, what to avoid, and even learn how to communicate verbally. By encouraging particular Norns to breed, 'players' can develop new strains with evolving characteristics.

Remarkably, it all seems to be going according to plan. *Creatures* – which gene biologist Richard Dawkins once described as the most impressive example of artificial life he'd ever had seen – has spawned a mass of eager pioneers in digital genetic research. These Creature fanatics breed intelligent Norns or new colour variations, then disseminate their prized specimens via the Internet. Popular Norns are downloaded by the hundred, and their genes propagated throughout the many copies of *Creatures* around the globe. It's like ordering up a syringe of Shergar's sperm.

Creatures on the Web is just one of many fan sites. Its speciality is specially selected new strains of Norns, such as Highlanders and Wolflings. The former are hardy specimens, able to live far longer then normal Norns, while the latter are wild Norns, barely touched by human hands, who've reverted to a feral state. Much of the correspondence on this site and others concerns getting Wolflings past their third generation.

Another meeting place is the Age of Albia site. This encompasses a huge variety of new material including multi-lobed (and therefore smarter) Norns, and overhauled breeding tools. Conversely, a more disturbing side to the *Creatures* phenomenon can be found at the Isle of Misfits, where *Creatures* followers send their most outlandish or unsociable Norns.

Thankfully, the official *Creatures* website takes a less twisted line. Instead of a cruel freakshow, users can find patches, upgrades, desirable Norns and new items for the title including a cuddly bear for sleepwalking Norns.

It's interesting that people are swapping Norns, and not their eggs as first envisaged. Yet is it so surprising? The Web is hosting a dynamic experiment in the exchange of genetic material. Who'd buy Shergar's offspring, which might have been mothered by any old nag, when the stud itself could be purchased?





Websites devoted to the game offer *Creatures* obsessives the opportunity to widen their gene pool with fresh young stock

Creatures on the Web is located at **www.budget.net/%7Etonyjett/index.html**, while Age of Albia can be found at at **http://www.geocities.com/~johnmull/** and the official Cyberlife Creatures page is situated at **http://www.cyberlife.co.uk/**

VRML shines in new **puzzle game** promo

The Rubik's Cube craze might never have occurred had a Saturday morning kids show not revealed one child's mastery of the puzzle. Subsequently, the country was gripped by Rubik's Cube fever.

Not wanting to leave things to chance, the creators of Space Cubes have taken a more proactive approach. They're attempting to create Web hysteria before the mind toys are even in the shops.

Space Cubes are the latest plastic teasers set to sweep the globe. They are essentially plastic-moulded 'C'-style shapes which hang together to form geometric structures. Players first master the Cube, then buy extra pieces to create the Chain or the Blob.

Fortunately the Space Cubes home page offers some explanation through VRML animations of the cubes in action, and it has already won the Silicon Graphics Buzz of the Week award. SGI claimed the page demonstrated 'an outstanding piece of VRML mastery.' More interestingly, it's one of the first occasions in which the real world and VRML have joined forces. To sell something, naturally.

For more information on Space Cubes, visit **http://www.spacecubes.com/index.html** – visitors will need a VRML player, however, such as *CosmoPlayer*, which can be downloaded from **www.netscape.com**



The Space Cubes page primes punters for the forthcoming toy

- THIS MONTH...
- N64 TAMAGOTCHI
- FAMICOM SALES
- TEKKEN ANIME

EDGE REPORTS ON THE VIRTUAL PET TREND THAT JUST WILL NOT DIE; NOW IT'S DUE FOR THE N64 AS *EVERYBODY'S TAMAGOTCHI*. NINTENDO, MEANWHILE, HAS BEEN BLOWING ITS CORPORATE TRUMPET OVER ITS 8 AND 16BIT CONSOLE SALES, WHILE NAMCO'S *TEKKEN* IS BEING USED AS A SOURCE FOR AN ANIMATED MOVIE

Tamagotchi fever dies while N64 gives birth to new breed

While the news that Bandai has now sold an estimated ten million Tamagotchi units worldwide is severely eye-opening, signs that the idiotic digital creatures craze has passed its peak are already emerging from Japan – much to **Edge**'s relief. Indeed, though widely available in shops, Tamagotchi 2 sales have (so far) proved disappointing in Japan.

Nevertheless, this hasn't stopped Bandai's new link-cable-compatible Game Boy version. More worrying, though, is *Everybody's Tamagotchi*, a proposed Nintendo 64 game based on the ghastly bleeping beasts. The 'game' is being developed in co-operation with HudsonSoft and will enable players to enter a world featuring a variety of mini-games – including a board game, casino activities and a trading-card game with more than 50 characters to choose from. The current design is best described as rough, and, despite the N64's vast palette, the developer has opted for subtle pastel-like shades, perhaps in order to maintain the 'motherly'-style values that have been so prevalent in the Tamagotchi's success.

How this will fare compared with 'real' games boggles the mind, particularly in a fickle society that leaps from one craze to another with such lightning rapidity. Tamagotchis are now so easily available that Tokyo residents can finally walk down the streets without fearing attack by Tamagotchi-starved assailants.

Perhaps they should now be assaulted for still owning and caring for them.

Keeping it in the Famicomily

Whereas in the UK most old consoles either gather dust on top shelves or suffer the ultimate indignity of the car-boot sale, in Japan they're doing a roaring trade, with the Famicom (NES) and Super Famicom (SNES) commanding prices of ¥4,980 (£26) and ¥5,800 (£30) respectively. And, by western standards, they're selling better than some of the latest machines on offer.

As a result, the worldwide sales figures are likely to surprise many. According to Nintendo of Japan, from March 1996 to April 1997 around 80,000 Famicoms and 3,300,000 Super Famicoms have been sold around the globe. This brings the Famicom total (from its release in March 1982) to a staggering 61,580,000. With 45,600,000 units, its big brother isn't doing too badly either, particularly when it's considered that it was released six years later.

Software figures are no less impressive, with 500,020,000 Famicom titles sold worldwide, and 359,210,000 for the Super Famicom.

The Famicom currently remains the world's most-sold videogaming platform, duly followed by its 16bit successor, the Super Famicom. This certainly puts the PlayStation count of 20,000,000 units in perspective, and leaves Sony with some catching up to do…

Tekken gets animated

The fact that, in Japan, a significant number of videogames are based on anime movies, themselves originating from manga comics, will hardly cause otakus to drop their joypads in disbelief. However, every now and then a game comes along that doesn't respect this traditional progression. And so it is that, just like *Street Fighter* before it, *Tekken* is to be made into an animated movie, with Namco entrusting the project to Sony Music Entertainment, which is working in conjunction with ASCII.

An OAV (original animation video) series is also planned, the story based primarily on the first two games, although aspects of *Tekken 3*, such as the relationship between Kazuya and Jun, being incorporated into the plot.

The first episode is planned for a November release in Japan, while the second should arrive in January 1998. In a typically astute marketing manoeuvre, both instalments will also support the *Tekken 3* PlayStation launch expected towards the end of the year in Japan.

Hopefully, the *Tekken* animation ventures will continue the quality of the videogame series to warrant an international release. This could of course encourage other developers to realise the movie-like potential of some of their titles, resulting in a flood of videogame-based anime. **Edge** balks at the prospect of a *Banjo-Kazooie* realisation… **E**



Derby Stallion: the biggest-selling PlayStation game in Japan over the last few months. See Arcadeview for more Japanese horsey gaming







Street Fighter has already set a high standard for game-to-anime releases – will *Tekken* make the transition as admirably?





As if the Tamagotchi phenomenon hadn't already touched people's lives enough (not to mention the horde of clones that followed), Bandai has persuaded Nintendo that the world needs a Nintendo 64 interpretation. The result appears to be an appropriately graphically sound title, although many will be dubious about the transition from carry-around-in-your-pocket device to home-based, super-powered 64bit console hardware…

Index

PRESCREEN ALPHAS

As usual, the Tokyo-based JAMMA convention threw up a number of interesting new coin-ops which will no doubt be attracting myriad clones next year. Best of a good bunch was Square's latest beat 'em up, **Ehrgeiz**, which employs a similar true 3D combat system to *Tobal* (including lots of side-stepping to get out of the usual 2D plane), but adds some unique features. Paramount among these is the increased interaction with the backgrounds: pugilists will be able to push objects at enemies and jump on obstacles. Additionally, some of the arenas have been placed on two levels to make the combat a little more taxing. With a variety of long-range attacks (including *Street Fighter*-esque fireballs), and some solid, precise character graphics, *Ehrgeiz* looks set to wield a substantial influence over the development of beat 'em ups as the millennium draws to a close.

Also on a beat 'em up tip was Capcom, presenting the implausibly titled **Rival Schools United by Fate**. This manga-inspired title boasts some truly original characters, and finely detailed character visuals on a par with those in *Tekken 3*. It also has an interesting scenario, in which the player takes control of




Square's *Ehrgeiz* features a similar combat model to *Tobal* but boasts more interactive backgrounds







Revealed at the JAMMA convention, *The Lost World Special* is a new version of AM3's on-rails shooter, complete with new cabinet and gameplay features






Rapid River is the latest in Namco's range of novelty-cabinet coin-ops. This one requires the player to grasp a paddle and furiously row down a series of treacherous white-water courses. It takes a lot of energy, but seems popular with couples



Motocross Go! features some huge jumps rather than just flat circuits



The System 23 board has allowed for some intricate background detail

a team of three fighters whose purpose is to conquer teams from competing high schools. With a combat system inspired by *X-Men vs Street Fighter* and a few new ideas chucked in, another bright Capcom classic could well be on the horizon.

Amongst Namco's many offerings was the promising offroad racer **Motocross Go!**, running on its System 23 board. Although it doesn't look massively more advanced than a standard System 22 title, it does offer some superbly detailed backgrounds and a finely balanced racing model. The cabinet itself (the player sits on a bike) boasts some finely tuned force-feedback shenanigans; players feel different vibrations depending on the surface they're racing on and the bike they've chosen. **Edge** just wonders how far this craze is going to go…

Unsurprisingly, considering *Final Fantasy VII*'s orgasmic reception, Square has two new RPG titles in development. One is **Xenogear**, which appropriates many of *FFVII's* gameplay

The cabinet bike, sponsored by Yamaha, offers an accurate force-feedback system which could prove painful to the player at times like these (below)



features and works them into a new, perhaps less graphically ambitious, world. The main thrust of the action seems to be the 3D battle scenes where the player has to defeat a mixture of monsters, some of whom are quite innovatively styled. It sounds limiting, but if these conflicts are as immersive as those in Square's premier PlayStation title, this could well provide an equally powerful hit for hack-and-slay fanatics everywhere.

Black Ops development has apparently spent over 20 months developing its mission-based underwater adventure ▶







Midway's *Off Road Challenge* offers eight courses and eight trucks with which to tackle them





Capcom has moved temporarily away from the *Street Fighter* licence to produce *Rivals United by Fate*, a team-based high school combat game







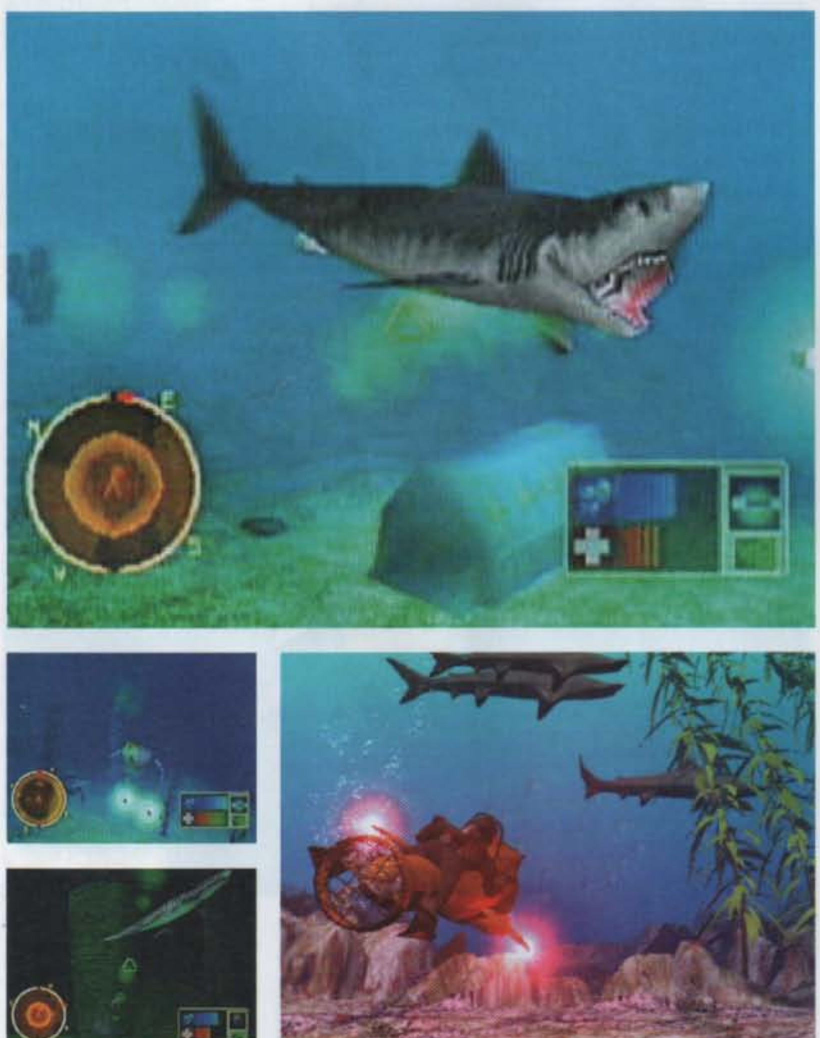
Street Fighter III: Second Impact Giant Attack (left) features two new characters, Hugo and Urien, as well as a variety of new moves

SquareSoft's latest RPG *Xenogears* (below) borrows many game ideas from the massively successful *Final Fantasy VII*, but places them in a totally different world



◀ **Treasures of the Deep**. Which could explain why it looks so beautifully intricate and atmospheric. The game makes eight vehicles and a variety of weapons and gadgets available to the player, who acts as a kind of scavanging James Bond, searching the ocean bed for loot while fighting off competitors. Along the way there are terrorist nuclear devices to disarm, enemy subs to blow up, and satellites to retrieve from deep-sea trenches. All in all, it looks to be a novel idea brilliantly executed.

The racing genre may be atrociously overcrowded at the moment, but Spanish developer Chaos Effect clearly feels there is still sufficient room for a few more contenders. Judging by its promising contribution to the cause – the stylish and distinctive **Rattle and Beetle** – the company may well be correct. What stands out immediately are the vehicles: ten personalised Volkswagen Beetles, each with different performance capabilities but all driven by psychopaths. This not-altogether-serious use of recognisable motors represents an intelligent move away from the standard sleek sports cars of *Ridge Racer* and its derivatives without straying into the cartoonish extremes of *Micro Machines* or *Big Red Racing*. There are similarities with the latter, though – interesting and colourful cartoony graphics, huge jumps, forgiving physics and an emphasis on smooth playability being the most notable. However, Chaos Effect has taken full advantage of the luxuries afforded by D3D and the P200 processor, putting Gouruad shading and light-sourcing wherever they'll be noticed. Great visuals and offbeat gameplay ideas? Why on earth hasn't this title got a publisher yet?



Treasures of the Deep takes a derivative mission-based action adventure structure and places it in a brilliantly evocative underwater environment – to great effect. It could prove to be a significant title for Namco in the States



Nintendo 64 title *Aero-Gauge* is a presentable *Wipeout*-style racer from Japanese developer ASCII. The vehicles seem peculiarly flat, but the circuits look interesting



The PC 3Dfx version of *Tomb Raider 2* (centre two shots) looks more visually impressive than its predecessor. These new visuals show a much wider graphical diversity, with outdoor and subaqua scenes looking particularly impressive. Mammoth sales are inevitable















The inclusion of vehicles in the game should add a new twist to the familiar *Tomb Raider* formula. And this isn't the only evidence that Core has been working on the gameplay as much as graphics. The shark (top left) in the underwater scene promises to add an extra dimension to unfortunate players' where's-the-air-hole panic. The PS version seen here suffers by comparison to the 3Dfx interpretation, but it still offers fast 3D

Meanwhile, the creator of the aforementioned *Big Red Racing* – Big Red Software – has now changed its name to Corrosive and is back with an altogether different kettle of polygons, **Assault Korps**. Here the player controls a small group of soldiers as they storm several enemy establishments, killing everything in their path with all manner of exotic weaponry. The basic gameplay elements and control system – click on where the men should go, click on what they should fire at, and so on – are rather reminiscent of *Cannon Fodder* (no bad thing in itself), but Corrosive has also added a further level of complexity in order to compete with the proliferation of military strategy sims on the shelves. Players will, for example, have to work out how to operate a cable car, bring down a ▶







Zoom's PlayStation sequel *Zero Divide 2* adds sharper character graphics and more detailed environments to an interesting robot beat 'em up concept





Namco's System 12 title *Libero Grande* doesn't look capable of knocking *Virtua Striker 2* off its podium as the best coin-op football game, and a potential PlayStation conversion would face fierce competition from Konami's *ISS Pro*





Rattle and Beetle from Chaos Effect mixes impressive visual realism with some knockabout gameplay and those eternally favoured studentmobiles







◀ portcullis, repair an armoured vehicle, and undertake various other tasks. The team has bowed to the visual obsessions of contemporary gamers by including smooth, lusciously detailed landscapes and explosions lifted from the Renny Harlin school of epic pyrotechnics. It will hit the PC and PlayStation in April.

Hyper Olympics (or *Negano Olympics '98* as it is to be known in the UK) is the latest addition to Konami's highly distinguished catalogue of sporting games. In this long-awaited follow up to the perennial PlayStation favourite *International Track & Field* the player has a choice of 16 countries to represent, a variety of play modes and 12 Winter sports to take part in, including alpine skiing, snowboarding, speed skating and curling. Unsurprisingly, the title, due for simultaneous release on the PlayStation and N64 to coincide with the Negano event (in February '98), will feature the same old frantic button-pressing action as previous games. What is surprising, however, is that the N64 visuals do not yet look too far removed from those on the PlayStation – and neither version looks particularly accomplished in the graphics department.

However, as Konami itself proved with *International Track & Field*, state-of-the-art graphics are not the most important ingredients of a good sports game... ∎











Shoot 'em up action and military strategy collide in Corrosive Software's promising *Assault Korps*. The filtered textures and realtime lighting impress

BURNING RANGERS

AFTER MONTHS OF SPECULATION, SEGA HAS FINALLY UNVEILED DETAILS OF SONIC TEAM'S LASTEST PROJECT, AN AMBITIOUS, POTENTIALLY EXCITING AND SPECTACULAR ADDITION TO THE SATURN'S CATALOGUE







Sonic Team proves that the Saturn can perform impressive lighting effects (above)







The levels in *Burning Rangers* regularly span several floors, meaning several miles of areas



Players have to explore the vast levels in order to successfully complete the missions before the relentless fire engulfs the whole area (above)

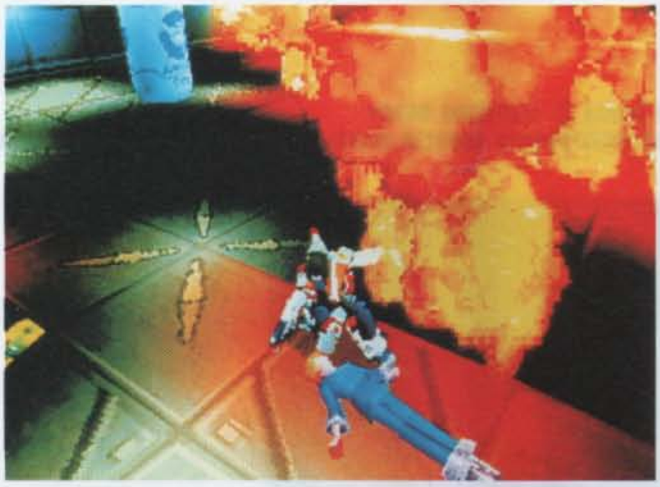
When news that the next Sonic game for the Saturn was to be handed to Traveller's Tales (the developer responsible for several of the blue hedgehog's past adventures), speculation arose as to what Sonic Team leader Yuji Naka's next project would be. While rumours circulated of a possible *NiGHTS* sequel, or even a Sonic game for the company's next hardware project, Sega kept quiet. Until the eve of the Tokyo Game Show, that is, when Naka himself unveiled the first details of *Burning Rangers*, Sonic Team's new title.

Already touted as possibly the most exciting game from the coders for some time, the action centres around the Burning Rangers, a futuristic firefighting force charged with the task of saving a city from imminent destruction. As a member of the team, players are continuously thrown into life-or-death situations and must don their exoskeleton suit to rescue victims, destroy enemy machines and extinguish flames using a variety of weapons.

The developer has paid particular attention to the game's AI in order to imbue the gameplay with a convincing degree of realism. As a result players will have to co-operate with other Rangers to complete missions successfully. To add variety while maintaining a challenge, the survivors and obstacles are generated randomly so that they're not necessarily in the same location every time the game is played. Currently a choice of two characters is offered, although it is possible the final version will allow any of the five team members to be selected. A twoplayer mode is also expected although confirmation has yet to come from Sega.

The animation is impressive and the control very responsive, with the Rangers able to climb, jump and run around the levels. Their mobile suits are fitted with jetpacks so that larger obstacles can be

Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	Sonic Team
Release:	March '98
Origin:	Japan



Apart from destroying enemy robots and extinguishing fires, the player's priority is to locate and save all the victims trapped in the blazing levels



As well as structural obstacles, players must be aware of possible explosion risks (right)





cleared in a single bound. To simplify matters, Sega has also included an 'auto-jump' option which allows novice players to concentrate on rescuing the stranded victims without having to worry about obstacles.

Unlike Sonic Team's previous foray into 3D, *NiGHTS*, here the characters interact with the game world in three dimensions, no longer constrained by an on-rails approach. Players can explore their surroundings freely – not an easy task, as each level, despite being set in a building, is huge: most buildings are four or five storeys high. Fortunately the other members of the team will check in periodically, giving audio cues should players need help getting back on track. Not that this should be a problem as a map is provided and a HUD compass is also available to aid individuals who are easily disoriented.

Despite the early nature of the version shown to the public, *Burning Rangers* was well received by onlookers. The game uses a second generation *NiGHTS* engine that is significantly more advanced than its predecessor in terms of both design and features. The team has also achieved some impressive lighting effects and transparencies, two visual delights once thought to be beyond the Saturn's abilities. Yet the proof that the Saturn can do it is there in the smooth, realistic red glow of fire and the progress of the characters' searchlights as they skim over twisted, burnt wreckage. Saturn diehards will also enjoy the subtle

THE TEAM HAS ALSO ACHIEVED SOME IMPRESSIVE LIGHTING EFFECTS AND TRANSPARENCIES, ONCE THOUGHT TO BE BEYOND THE SATURN'S ABILITIES

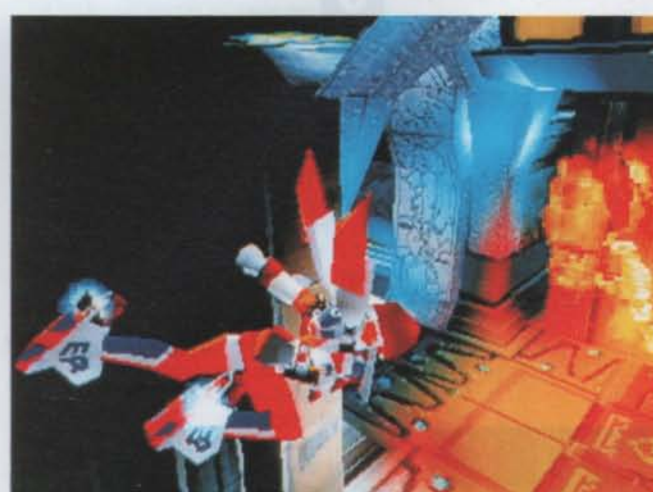
transparency effects evident in flames, lasers, and explosions.

As in *NiGHTS*, *Burning Rangers* will use a rating system, grading players from A-F. **Edge** wouldn't be surprised if the game features several endings, each depending on the player's performance and score. Expect more details to emerge from Sega as *Burning Rangers* nears release.





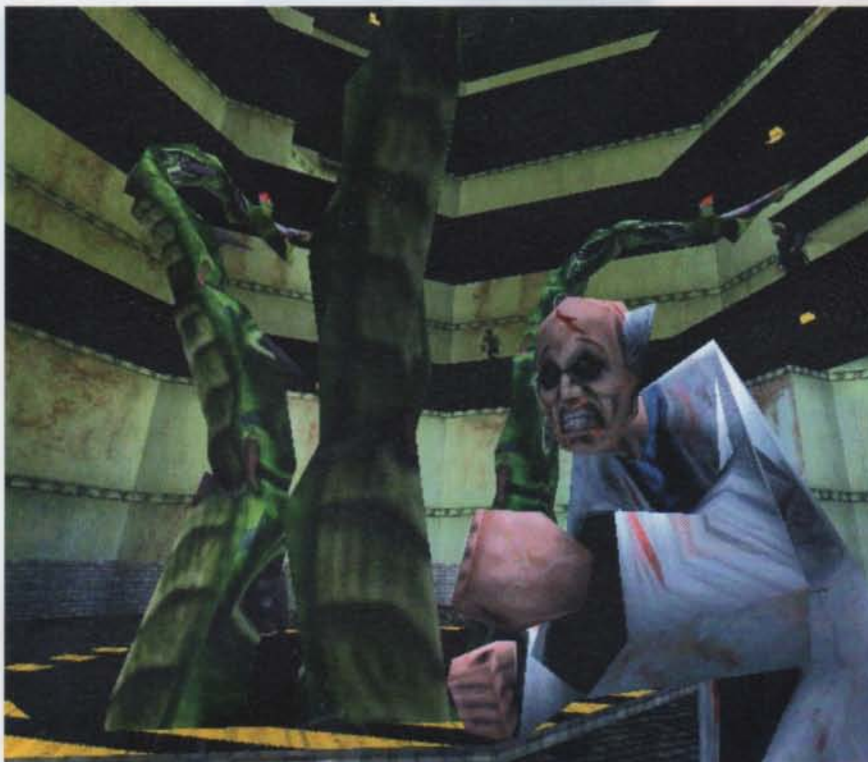
The action takes place within damaged and therefore structurally unstable buildings



The characters' exoskeleton suits will not only protect them from the high temperatures, but also enable them to leap into the air to avoid obstacles

HALF-LIFE

While gamers the world over wait in breathy anticipation for Quake 2, fledgling outfit Valve is aiming to redefine the first-person shooter genre with its audacious first title





One of the biggest improvements *Half-Life*'s 3D engine makes over that of the original *Quake* is the complexity of its enemy characters – some monsters are constructed from over 6,000 polygons. Equally impressively, they're not all simply nondescipt cannon fodder – they turn up in all shapes and sizes

One of the perils of arms trading is that, while you stash the cash, you can never be certain that whoever you sell to won't turn your own weapons on you. So it may prove to be for id and its profitable licensing of the *Quake* engine. For as the audience waits for the curtains to part on *Quake II* this Christmas, it could be a relative unknown that steals the spotlight. Valve, a year-old softco, and *Quake* licensee, is hoping to redefine the parameters of the first-person shooter with *Half-Life*, its very first title. Ambitious indeed, but from what **Edge** has seen, by no means unrealistic.

Unlike the usual perfunctory 'Earth under attack' scenarios, *Half-Life* features a fully scripted storyline. The player takes the role of a scientist trapped in a vast, underground laboratory housing a secret Portal device (an inter-dimensional gate). The Portal goes tonto, vomits up hordes of mutant creatures, leaving the player with a stained white coat and an understandable desire to flee the lab and make for the surface. As progress is made, the story allows for different tactics to be taken according to the player's mood – doors can be kicked down and room hosed with grenades, a more cerebral path can be used. Furthermore, throughout the game, the story is deepened both locally and generally by many scripted sequences integrated into the action. These are not cutaways, but rather scenes witnessed in apparent realtime during the action. For example, players may see a fellow scientist being attacked by a monster and hide as it devours the body. Or the monster could be killed in order to glean useful information from the scientist. Apart

Format:	PC
Publisher:	CUC Software
Developer:	Valve
Release:	November
Origin:	US





The first-person genre may be stifled, but Valve's original touches should make *Half-Life* stand out



A flexible, module-based enemy AI system caters for those moments when opponents would best serve themselves by fetching reinforcements and arranging pincer movements





Leading-edge lighting effects combine with complex geometry to make this one stunning-looking experience









The diversity of scenery within *Half-Life* is laudable; it's not all brown, brown, brown

from the care that has been taken to make these scenes diverting (whether horrific or humorous), what makes them credible is the amazing animation on all the creatures.

One of the Valve's many significant technical advances over the original *Quake* engine is its Skeletal Animation System. Rather than storing a set of polygonal meshes for each key frame of animation, the skeletal system works by moving the bones within an organism and deforming a mesh and texture map around the skeleton. The results are spectacular. Whereas a *Quake* monster uses about 500 polys, a *Half-Life* monster can use in excess of 6,000. And, because the character motions and bone positions are interpolated to precisely the point in the frame being rendered, everything moves with unprecedented fluidity. Monsters can be seen to breath, turn their heads while running, and lose limbs through wing-shots. Moreover, the AI is commensurately improved. Using a system based on flexible 'modules' instead of if-then routines allows for enemies that run away and fetch reinforcements, crouch to reload, advance while others give covering fire, or duck out of sight and take pot shots. And as if this wasn't enough, the monsters are multi-sensory. Some are blind but can hear, others can follow the player's smell. As a result, combating the intelligence and unpredictability of the adversaries in *Half-Life* looks to be both more realistic and a good deal scarier than in previous games in the genre.

The creation of a rich and plausible game environment has been greatly helped by a raft of other technical innovations. The game runs in 16bit colour by default and supports multiple-sourced coloured lighting (which can be mixed and blended to gorgeous effect), smoke, translucency, and dynamically changing surfaces: water ripples when walked through, walls scar and burn. Sound has not been overlooked, either: utilising a proprietary real-time DSP (digital signal processing) technique, a single sound effect can be modulated according to the player's surroundings, all in direction-sourced 3D.

There can be little doubt that *Half-Life* is set to be the most exhaustively detailed 3D action-game yet. If Valve can marry its technical and conceptual prowess to a game design that is as engrossing as it is impressive, it could surprise a lot of people. Not least John Carmack.



Another of *Half-Life*'s unique selling points is its array of multi-sensory creatures – players can run, but covering their scents may prove tricky

TOP GEAR RALLY

IN SPITE OF ITS ADMITTEDLY AWESOME CAPABILITIES, THE NINTENDO 64 STILL LACKS AN ESSENTIAL RACING TITLE. THE SITUATION MUST BE REDRESSED BEFORE THE OPPOSITION DISAPPEARS OVER THE HORIZON...





In championship mode, 20 cars race against each other through a variety of countries featuring differing track surfaces. Some of the effects, such as weather, or the cars' headlights (right), are particularly convincing. They are but a handful of the touches which bring a degree of realism to the game







Players can opt for chase-cam views (top, middle) and a faster in-car view (above)

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Kemco
Developer:	Boss
Release:	Dec 20 (Japan)
Origin:	US

As far as the racing genre is concerned, the N64 has been overtaken by every other currently popular machine. After the dreadful *Cruis'n USA* and *Human Grand Prix* episodes, the stakes were raised slightly with *Multi-Racing Championship*, yet the N64 is still in desperate need of a decent racing game able to compete successfully against the faster and slicker 32bit market offerings.

Of course, forthcoming contenders such as *Lamborghini 64* from Titus and Seta's *Rev Limit* (whose progress has apparently now been taken on board by Nintendo), have their sights squarely set on the N64's racing champion cup. But Kemco must be hoping its *Top Gear Rally* title will do for the 64bit machine what *Sega Rally* did for the Saturn, and more importantly, what *V-Rally* is currently doing for the PlayStation; a good racer is always a credibility boost.

In this latest powersliding extravaganza, players must choose one of ten vehicles from a range of manufacturers – including Ford, Nissan, BMW, and Toyota – and spend three laps on four circuits set in dense jungle, arid desert land, sandy seaside and treacherous mountainous passes.

Furthermore, advanced drivers can look forward to an extra, highly technical hidden track – and, of course, the obligatory extra cars can also be found. Transmission, tyres and suspension can be tweaked so that the car's handling can be made to suit personal preferences, while fog, rain, snow, and the obscurity of night-time sections add an extra element for drivers to deal with.

In addition to the self-explanatory practice and time attack modes, the arcade level will allow players to select any circuit and engage in twoplayer battles should they have friends at their disposal. There is a noticeable drop in speed for the splitscreen option, although the pace remains faster than its equivalent in *Multi-Racing Championship*, with a superior level of detail on-screen.

The game will also feature a championship mode in which players undertake seven seasons, each incorporating several courses with random weather effects. A scoring system similar to real-life rallying is used, so that the top six drivers are rewarded with championship points, and a specific number of these must be attained before progressing onwards to the next season.





Night sections (above) might recreate the adrenaline-rush that is real-life rallying better than the more light-friendly stages







Players who overdo it will, of course, suffer the consequences (far left), but even with great care taken, it's still possible to slide off the track for a spot of off-roading (above)





Thankfully, the majority of the tracks are wide enough to cater for the biggest of powerslides

Also, rather than simply have drivers revisiting the same circuits seven times, the designers have included a mirror mode for the last three seasons, effectively extending the number of tracks as well as adding a certain amount of variety.

Furthermore, racing fans with a penchant for art will revel in *Top Gear Rally*'s 'paint shop' option, which allows players to customise their car's appearance using a reasonably comprehensive toolbox similar to those found on full-blown paint programmes, although the actual painting is limited to some text and simple shapes. Nevertheless, should a design be worth saving, this can of course be done by simply slotting a memory card into the appropriate joypad port.

US developer Boss Game Studios has included several touches in an attempt to add a degree of realism to its title. As a result, players are not restricted by invisible barriers on the side of the road, and can in fact wander off the track should they feel exploring their surroundings will help them win the race. Also, actual damage ensues when cars collide, followed by a realistic, and therefore reasonable, drop in speed.

FOG, RAIN, SNOW AND AND THE SPOTLIT OBSCURITY OF NIGHT-TIME SECTIONS ADD AN EXTRA ELEMENT OF RISK FOR PLUCKY CONTENDERS TO DEAL WITH

Top Gear Rally is looking impressive, with a precise analogue control system, effective weather effects (the ice stages are particularly attractive), and with a higher level of graphical detail than its nearest competitor, *Multi-Racing Championship*. Whether or not Boss Game Studios' product goes down the same road as Ocean's racer remains to be seen – but the N64 needs a good one, and soon...





The game's twoplayer mode retains a healthy frame rate throughout



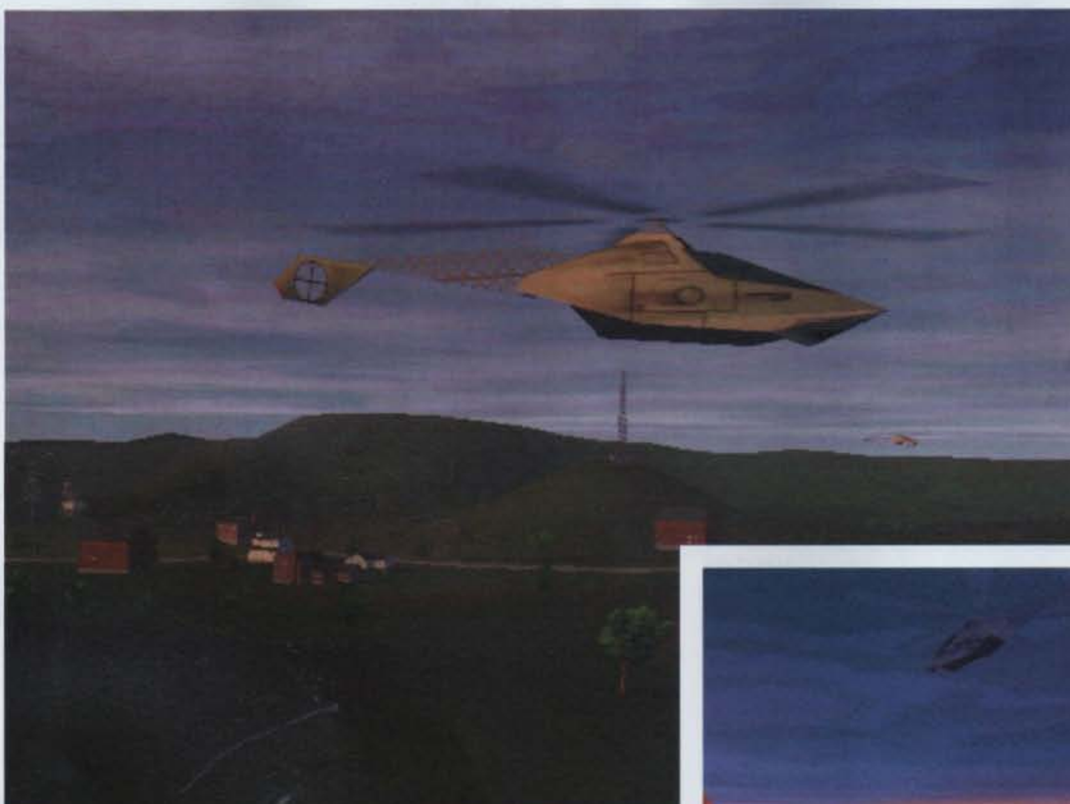
Some of the surfaces will test even the best of players' abilities to the full, although having an intelligently sponsored car might help matters a bit





BARRAGE

Although at first glance it may appear to be a strait-laced helicopter flight sim, this new title from four-man team Mango Grits is a full-on shoot 'em up with immense visual style













***Barrage* does away with the need for fogging, taking full advantage of the 3Dfx hardware. Like *Powerslide*, from Emergent, it will be accelerator-only**

Format:	PC
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Mango Grits
Release:	December (Net)
Origin:	US

Mango Grits, based in Burbank in California, comprises just four staff, making it one of the smallest codeshops in the world. This factor makes *Barrage*, and the impressive technology which drives it, all the more remarkable.

Superficially, *Barrage* is little more than a shoot 'em up, a flight-sim/firstperson hybrid title with an elementary premise: fly a hover-fighter-aircraft freely around a number of 3D environments, destroying the scattered 'power buoys' that open the portals to the following level. Hardly revolutionary in concept, then, but that's not the reason Mango Grits garnered so much attention at this year's E3 event.

Both Shiny Entertainment and Innerloop are currently touting their 'infinite horizon' engines, and Mango Grits is also offering zero fogging. **Joan Wood**, who seems to wear a number of hats at Grits, explains: 'We're not depending on fogging to hide a close clipping plane because we wanted to get away from that sort of claustrophobic cheat, and the 3Dfx hardware we're using is quite capable. Instead of that fog, we're using every database design trick we know.'

Those tricks, which give the game its distinctive no-fog appearance, were learned from programming Infinite Reality Engine high-end workstations. The team's experiences with that technology lead them



The environments are incredibly detailed, and could set a new standard for realtime PC 3D







The only grey area concerning *Barrage* is, unsurprisingly, gameplay. Certainly, with such inspired technology at Mango Grits' disposal, it would seem a shame to limit the scope to a humble shoot 'em up



The action takes place underwater as well as on land, and boasts some startling models

to the 3Dfx Voodoo chipset, and by extension to Intel's Open Architecture Arcade Initiative, *Barrage* will be one of the growing number of accelerator-only titles when it's released next year, joining Emergent Software's *Powerslide* in taking advantage of the polygon-pushing power of the Voodoo chipset. Unlike Emergent, however, the Californian company won't be using the 3Dfx Glide API. Aligning itself with id, Mango Grits has opted for Open GL.

By restricting the game to 3Dfx or similar technology, Mango Grits is able to construct a complex environment with a high polygon count that would slow the action to a snail's pace on even a high-end Pentium. As the likes of PowerVR begin to catch up – and exceed – the capabilities of Voodoo, *Barrage* will actually tailor itself to the increased resolution and rendering power by loading in more complex models. The high minimum specification is proving a problem for potential publishers, many of whom don't yet see the 3D accelerator market approaching the maturity to support hardware-only titles. Mango Grits is therefore taking the unusual step of publishing *Barrage* itself, through the Internet.

With the technical aspects taken care of, the only question mark that hangs above the project is, as ever, gameplay. Pushing the technology to its limits is always admirable,

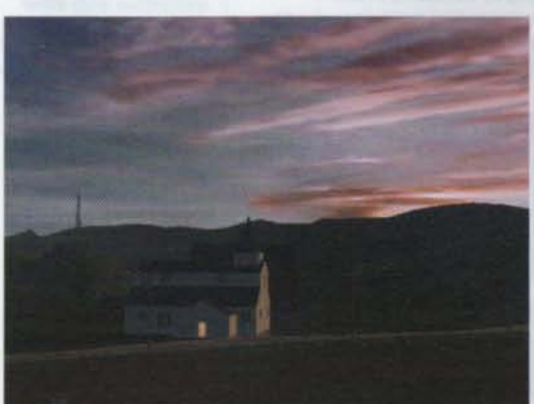
3DFX MAKES IT POSSIBLE TO CONSTRUCT A COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT WITH A HIGH POLYGON COUNT THAT WOULD CRAWL EVEN ON A HIGH-END PENTIUM

and **Edge** is hoping that the Mango Grits gang of four can elevate *Barrage* above the crop when it gets a full release next year courtesy of a more enlightened publisher. In the meantime, interested parties should direct their attentions to http://www.mangogrits.com instead.





***Barrage* appears to be an especially varied game, with a diverse selection of locales**





It's a little hard to tell from these shots, but *Barrage* is a shoot 'em up. Everything that can be seen can be destroyed, from the smallest farm implement to the tallest building. This reflection technique (right) certainly heightens the atmosphere

PARASITE EVE

RENOWNED FOR ITS RPG SERIES, SQUARESOFT HAS RECENTLY ATTEMPTED TO DIVERSIFY INTO OTHER GENRES, INCLUDING THIS 3D ADVENTURE AIMED SQUARELY AT CAPCOM'S RESIDENT EVIL







Parasite Eve **will undoubtedly feature as much exploration of the game's many settings (above) as shooting countless dangerous creatures (left)**



SquareSoft's take on *Resident Evil* promises numerous memorable locations and setpieces

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	SquareSoft
Developer:	In-house
Release:	Late '97
Origin:	US

It's easy to underestimate the shattering effect *Resident Evil* had on the videogaming community. Prior to its release, many observers doubted the title's potential – yet the resulting effect was more than just simply financial success; Capcom's horror yarn instigated a movement within the games industry that has since seen many a developer announcing its own addition to the third-person adventure genre.

Parasite Eve is SquareSoft's attempt to grab a piece of the action. The game is based on a successful novel, later adapted into a film that was well received upon release in Japan last year.

Realising the potential in such a title, SquareSoft has decided to convert the story into a PlayStation adventure and the project is rumoured to be even more ambitious than *Final Fantasy VII*. To ensure success in this effort, Square has employed the services of some of Hollywood's top CGI artists to handle the graphical aspect of the game. Steve Gray, whose credits include *True Lies* and *Apollo 13*, will be directing, while the art direction will be handled by Darnell Williams, a veteran of *Casper*.

The plot of *Parasite Eve* will differ fundamentally from the movie and is the labour of Takashi Tokita, who worked on RPGs *Chrono Trigger* and *Final Fantasy VII*. The game is being developed by Square in the US but the renowned Hironobu Sakaguchi will act as the project's executive producer. Unusually for a Japanese effort, the action centres around various different areas of New York – though the presence of a young, blond-haired detective as the heroine isn't too far removed from the manga norm.

The title was present at the recent Tokyo Game Show, and drew much attention from the public despite only being shown in video form on a screen above SquareSoft's stand. However, judging by the quality of the footage, the Japanese RPG master's push into the 3D adventure genre could be something very special indeed...



As in *Resident Evil*, interaction with other characters will be a necessary gaming factor



The first shots released by SquareSoft were merely hi-res workstation renders. In-game graphics are less accomplished

GRAND PRIX LEGENDS

WHILE MOST FORMULA ONE GAMES ARE BASED ON THE PRESENT, FOR ITS LATEST RACING TITLE PAPYRUS HAS LOOKED TO THE PAST IN AN ATTEMPT TO CAPTURE THE EXCITEMENT OF A BYGONE ERA







The realistic physics model means that good drivers powerslide round a corner (above left), while bad ones do not bother (left)

To many Formula 1 fans, 1967 represents the end of an era, and possibly the most romantic season in the sport's 50-year history. It was the last year before the cars sprouted wings and the sport itself began to transmute into the megabuck corporate circus it is today.

It was also the deadliest period the sport has witnessed. The circuits – with their narrow, tree-lined surfaces, rapid changes in elevation and fast, open bends – were extremely hazardous, while a surfeit of grunt over grip made the cars perilously unforgiving of driver error. The potential for a powerful gaming experience recreating the excitement, danger and romance of the time is therefore enormous.

Grand Prix Legends features 11 tracks; the design team visited several town halls to obtain blueprints for tracks that have since vanished or fallen into disrepair. This tireless pursuit of realism also applies to the cars' handling – even at this stage, anyone applying basic racing principles will get an extremely satisfactory response from their vehicle, and with practice they'll be powersliding intuitively round corners on full opposite lock.

Matt Sentell, project producer, is confident that the new physics model will supersede anything currently on the market. 'It's truly 3D all the time,' he says, 'so what can happen is that one wheel can leave the ground. Most games only distinguish the car being on the track, or completely off the track, instead of true physics being applied.'

Dave Kaemmer, the force behind all of Papyrus' racing technology, has spent over a year perfecting the physics model. 'We are modelling everything,' he says, 'right down to gyroscopic torques. So when you jump the car, if you turn the steering wheel, it will make the thing start to turn, like a real car.'

Papyrus is aiming for 16bit, 640x480 graphics, with support for 3D accelerator cards and eight network players. With a realistic minimum of a P90 to run the game, Formula 1 fans with older equipment should invest in more competitive machinery before *Grand Prix Legends* is released.



The attention to detail extends to drivers releasing the steering wheel to change gears

Format:	PC
Publisher:	CUC Software
Developer:	Papyrus
Release:	May '98
Origin:	US



All of the cars and drivers that took part in the 1967 season will feature in what promises to be an impressively realistic Formula 1 simulation

SHINING FORCE III

While PlayStation owners already have a definitive RPG, Sega has yet to produce an equivalent. The company is hoping that the sequel to a successful Mega Drive series may redeem matters, though



Players familiar with the Mega Drive originals will immediately notice the addition of a third dimension to the proceedings. Sega has given its artists free reign to explore the Saturn's colour palette – with excellent results









Battle scenes have also been bolstered thanks to polygons and some bold lighting effects

Format:	Saturn
Publisher:	Sega
Developer:	In-house
Release:	Dec '97 (Japan)
Origin:	Japan

After releasing several *Shining Force* spin-offs (including *Shining Wisdom* and the disappointing *Shining the Holy Ark*), on a variety of its formats, Sega has finally decided to stop beating about the bush. As a result, later this year fans of the original Mega Drive series will be granted a true sequel.

Nearing the end of its two years of development, *Shining Force III* will take place within a 3D world but remains faithful to the series' roots by retaining the 'flat' combat system – the characters will be modelled in 3D but move along a flat axis, in a similar fashion to SquareSoft's battle display in *Final Fantasy VII*. The confrontations will occur in realtime, with players employing the usual combination of weapons and magic spells.

Although Sega's approach to this sequel has been one of cautious evolution, newcomers and fans alike will applaud the more freeform way in which the plot unfolds. Three scenarios – rumoured to have been written immediately after the series' second instalment – will be offered, with three stories in each. The stories are tightly integrated, so that a player's actions in one will not only influence the proceedings of that particular episode, but also the others that follow. This promises to add a compelling extra dimension to the already-strong narrative for which the series is renowned.

The quality of the graphics, especially in textures, is thoroughly impressive. The town sections (where players do the usual building-to-building search for food, weapons and other useful artefacts while prodding the locals for information) are enlivened by an imaginative approach to colour and design, and Saturn diehards will also appreciate the loving attention paid to special effects, which see everything, from magic spells to weather effects professionally executed.

Shining Force III is looking promising, and looks set to give Japanese Saturn owners a compelling excuse not to venture outside this Winter.







As with most RPGs, a degree of roaming about and suburban ferreting is necessary. The rich locations offer a decent level of scenery variety

VIRTUAL HIRYU NO KEN

THE N64 HAS NOT YET EDGED AHEAD OF ITS 32BIT RIVALS OUTSIDE NINTENDO'S TRADITIONAL AREAS OF EXPERTISE; CULTURE BRAIN'S BEAT 'EM UP MAY BE JUST WHAT THE WORLD IS WAITING FOR





The normal mode restores the fighters correct proportions and also takes its fighting more seriously. The N64 version is understandably more graphically advanced than its PlayStation equivalent, and the promise of analogue control must give this a chance of becoming the leading beat 'em up on the N64





The SD mode, with its amusing polygons and easier gameplay, is aimed at beginners

The beat 'em up has proved a particular thorn in the N64's side; it still hasn't managed to establish superiority over its competitors in this genre. Every 64bit fighting offering so far has been at best average, and as such has understandably failed to drag Saturn and PlayStation owners away from the likes of *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Tekken 2*.

Virtual Hiryu no Ken is based on the PlayStation game of the same name and as such will feature two fighting modes: a normal and a super-deformed option. Both offer 20 levels, enabling players to progressively improve their combat skills, but the super-deformed mode features visually amusing characters and is therefore aimed primarily at a younger audience.

Rather than forcing players simply to battle their way to the top, developer Culture Brain has allowed them to collect items along the way. These can be put to great use during special attacks, increasing the deadliness of the assault. In total, more than 150 items can be acquired, and they can be bought or sold in shops as well as exchanged with another player via the joypad's memory pack. Although this is merely a simple trading game within the main program, it does add an extra strategic dimension to the game.

In super-deformed mode, special attacks can be performed at any time, with a gauge keeping track of the number of these attacks used. When the gauge reaches its maximum, players can either perform a new special attack or obtain a new item. The normal mode is different in that it offers three gauges: a health bar, a combo gauge similar to the SD game, and a third bar displaying the time allocated to use the special attacks, which in this mode cannot be deployed according to a player's wishes.

Initially, ten characters can be chosen in both modes, with hidden fighters appearing later on in the game. In addition to the main combat sections there are versus, survival, practice, team battle, circuit, and tournament modes. In the latter, players face eight characters in a row whereas the circuit mode is an individual battle against computer-controlled opponents.

As a result of Culture Brain's experience, *Virtual Hiryu no Ken* is a fighting game accessible to both beginners and veterans of the genre. Whether its use of the analogue control will make it a more accurate and, ultimately, more enjoyable experience than its 32bit cousin – and capable of taking on that market's undisputed champions – only the future will tell.





The more forgiving SD game rewards the execution of special attacks with points, which can be exchanged for items at the end of the bouts

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Culture Brain
Developer:	In-house
Release:	TBA
Origin:	Japan

THE DARK PROJECT

Looking Glass Technologies is set to transcend its reputation for demanding too much of the PC's graphical abilities with a title that promises immersion and intelligence as its selling point







The crisp hi-res visuals will be aided and abetted by the latest 3D accelerator cards

The last time **Edge** looked at *The Dark Project* (**E**43), it was a shell of a game – intriguing, fascinating even, but a shell nevertheless. How could a medieval-inspired first-person adventure form its own identity in the wake of *Quake*? The answer, said Looking Glass, would be in the game's totally immersive environment – its realism, its intelligence, its revolutionary 'Act and React' technology which bestows real world physics on game objects. Although it is still too early to confirm the validity of these assertions, new material revealed at ECTS hints at a far from run-of-the-mill title.

The plot is certainly shaping up nicely. The player takes on the role of a thief in a mythical city where fourteenth century architecture merges with nineteenth century technology. It's a world of shadows and darkness, intermittently lit to create a sinister atmosphere – helped no end by beautiful light-mapping. Character design is equally impressive; Looking Glass has boasted about its detailed skin polygon meshes and state-of-the-art motion capture, and both seem to have added an eerie reality to the characters.

Looking Glass is keen to make significant advances in the gameplay area, too. There are 20 missions to sneak through, some of which require the robber to abseil down walls and dive beneath aqueducts. At other points the player must listen to enemy soldiers talking with each other; in this way it is possible to work out their plans and formulate ambushes – a fascinating touch.

With all the elements coming together as planned, Looking Glass looks to have an interesting contender. *Quake 2* and *Unreal* are likely to set the tone for graphics next year but this title, if it lives up to expectations, is capable of leapfrogging both by sheer virtue of its innovative gameplay ideas. Time will tell, however, if gamers really do want their first-person shooters to have brains as well as brawn.







Although *The Dark Project* bears many resemblances to *Quake*, Looking Glass remains adamant the game boasts many gameplay innovations









The game offers an atmospheric range of shadowy environments which boast dramatic lighting effects

Format:	PC
Publisher:	Eidos
Developer:	Looking Glass
Release:	April '98
Origin:	US

DIDDY KONG RACING

In a typical Nintendo move, the Japanese videogames colossus has revealed a super-secret Rare-developed title which holds the potential to revolutionise the racing game genre









The most obvious new element in ***Diddy Kong Racing*** is the ability to race either in a kart (above), a hovercraft (top right), or an aeroplane (right), with obvious handling differences



The videogaming world may be full of surprises, but only Nintendo would suddenly announce a major title just three months prior to its release. Previously swathed in secrecy, *Diddy Kong Racing* is one such title. It has been in development at Rare for the best part of two years, and will now be Nintendo's major N64 Christmas release (*Banjo-Kazooie* has been delayed until March 1998, while *Legend of Zelda 64* is now expected in the Spring).

So far, with titles such as *Blast Corps* and the astounding *GoldenEye*, Rare has brought undisputed quality to the N64's limited software range, and currently seems like the only developer other than Nintendo able to get the best out of the diminutive 64bit machine. So it was with a substantial amount of anticipation that **Edge** visited the company's HQ, situated in a peaceful village amidst Warwickshire's countryside, to view its latest offering.

Anyone unaware of Rare's pedigree would find a stroll through the firm's corridors brutally enlightening – framed promotional prints of its extensive and illustrious back catalogue adorn every possible wall space. Indeed, the room where *Diddy Kong Racing* is demonstrated is decorated with countless poster-sized magazine covers featuring past Rare-developed products, including **Edge**'s *Killer Instinct* image from the cover of issue 12. The atmosphere is therefore appropriate as an N64 and a large-screen television at one end of an otherwise-cleared conference-style table are switched on, and the intro sequence kicks off.

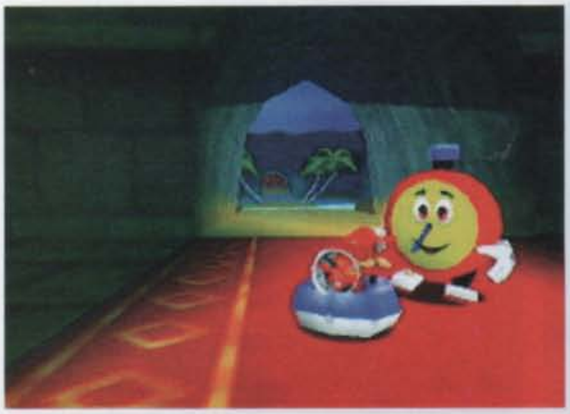
The quality of presentation throughout the game is first class, easily equalling anything that has emerged from NCL, with strong character design and humorous touches. Observers who like to categorise games into some kind of easily definable genres might be tempted to draw comparisons with *Mario Kart 64* even before the game begins, yet according to **Lee Schuneman**, the game's director, this

Format:	Nintendo 64
Publisher:	Nintendo
Developer:	Rare
Release:	November (US)
Origin:	UK





In the adventure mode, races featuring different vehicles occur at several stages, with players forced to apply all of their racing skills. Four views are available for each of the three modes of transport – far out, out, close, and standard (right)



Bump into 'TT' and he'll open up the time trial mode, which can be used to practice on any of the adventure option tracks



The Genie wanders around the game's central area and helps out players by occasionally challenging them to a race and offering a secret golden balloon should they beat him

◄ would be a mistake, and he's quick to point out the game's unique qualities.

'*Diddy Kong Racing* is a "racing adventure". Its whole concept is completely different to *Mario Kart*. People may initially view it as being similar to *Mario Kart*, but if you play the game for a few minutes, you'll discover how the adventure is interwoven with the racing.

'The inspiration for *DKR* came from the desire to create something new and original in the racing genre... We knew from the start that we had to create something very different in order for this game to stand out.'

Two modes therefore exist: Adventure and Racing. The latter is a simple, straight-up racing affair allowing up to four players to compete against each other using any means necessary. Indeed, power-ups and weapons feature heavily in both modes, with players needing to collect bananas to increase their speed. A further five advantageous components – turbos, magnets, shields, oil slicks and missiles – also play a part. These are dotted around the courses in the form of coloured balloons, and collecting two or three of a kind will increase the weapon's power. Bursting two red balloons in a row, for instance, will turn standard missiles into heat-seeking devices, while three balloons will allow players to fire off ten rockets against their opponents.

While the concept of the multiplayer option might not sound revolutionary, it's the one or twoplayer co-operative mode that sets *Diddy Kong Racing* apart, shattering cynics' assumptions that this a simple attempt at recreating merely a slightly different take on *Mario Kart 64*. The most immediate difference is the possibility to race in a variety of vehicles. After choosing one of the eight initially selectable characters, including Banjo the bear, Conker the squirrel, and of course Diddy Kong (who made his first appearance in *Donkey Kong Country* on the SNES in 1994), players begin racing in standard karts, but aeroplanes and hovercrafts become available at different stages as the game progresses. Each of the vehicles handles differently and therefore a different style must be adopted for each of the races, but their control is intuitive, and competent players will soon be powersliding their way round corners on two wheels, performing loops in the sky, and hovering their way to the finish line with relative ease.



The other aspect that soon becomes apparent is the fact that winning all of the four races on the four worlds isn't the game's only objective, merely *DKR*'s first task. The game boasts a depth hitherto unseen in a racing title, hence Schuneman's earlier reluctance to describe it as such. Completing a world's four tracks opens up a new track where players face a boss. If beaten, the boss will issue a new challenge – to collect all of the eight silver coins now found on each of the courses, before meeting him again to get a piece of an amulet. Accumulating all of the amulet pieces will allow players to face WhizPig, the final boss.

And yet this is only half of the game, for after the end sequence, players must engage in trophy tournaments (four races in each of the worlds) in order to win the gold trophy. Also, a further world opens up towards the end of the game

THE ONE OR TWOPLAYER CO-OPERATIVE MODE SETS DIDDY KONG RACING APART, SHATTERING CYNICS' ASSUMPTIONS THAT THIS IS MERELY A SIMPLE ATTEMPT TO RECREATE MARIO KART 64

and hidden in one of the tournament tracks is a key that allows access to the world's battle level. These can take a variety of forms, ranging from straightforward battles to whizzing around an arena in the plane, picking up an egg from a huge central nest and bringing it back to the character's base while staving off the CPU opponents.



Initially, *Diddy Kong Racing* will feature eight characters for players to choose from, all displaying the kind of strong design quality usually associated with Nintendo titles. Three of the characters – Diddy, Banjo, and Conquer – feature in some of Rare's other recent games, while the other five are original



Regardless of the mode of transport, there are always weapon balloons scattered around the track which must be burst before deploying their contents on unsuspecting rivals









Two players are able to race through the adventure mode in a co-operative fashion (top). A further multiplayer option allows four players to compete against each other

And this opposition is relentless, displaying anything but stupidity. As the player progresses, they too improve, taking many of the different routes and shortcuts featured in every track. It's one of the aspects of the game that Schuneman is deservedly proud of: 'The racing AI in *DKR* is extremely advanced – your opponents react to their surroundings and each other's performance. They will burst weapon balloons,

'NEVER BEFORE HAVE SO MANY LARGE, COLOURFUL, HIGHLY TEXTURED AND DYNAMICALLY ANIMATED CHARACTERS BEEN ABLE TO RUN LOOSE THROUGH A GAME WORLD'



they'll upgrade their weapons, they'll take varying racing lines [and] do everything possible to create the best race possible.'

Visually, *Diddy Kong Racing* looks excellent, with a wide range of beautifully textured environments whose quality is reminiscent of *Super Mario 64* and Rare's other N64 game, *Banjo-Kazooie*. This is possible through what Rare terms 'Realtime Dynamic Animation' technology.

'Never before have so many large, colourful and highly textured characters, each of them environment mapped and dynamically animated, been able to run loose through the game world, while maintaining a high frame rate – 30fps,' enthuses Schuneman. 'Using this technology we're able to create huge worlds with horizons that stretch far into the distance without resorting to fogging.'

Another benefit of this technology is its suite of advanced editing tools which guarantee every element of the game is within easy reach of each team member at all times, allowing them to concentrate on the other aspects of the game. With *DKR*, Rare feels it has achieved all it could be asked to pull out of the hardware, given its current level of software development. Schuneman remains optimistic about the future, though. 'You can guarantee that we'll push the console a little bit more with each game,' he says confidently. 'We still feel there's a lot more to be seen from the N64 – it's still in its infancy.'

Nintendo of Japan is reported to be extremely enthusiastic about *Diddy Kong Racing*'s potential as its next potential blockbuster, and the Kyoto-based videogame giant is reinforcing the message in the US with a $10 million advertising campaign – the highest ever for an N64 game – and an unprecedented one million copies of the game are expected to be in the nation's stores for the first day of its release. It looks set to draw a lot of takers…



Predictably, the game's replay mode continues the quality found in all the other areas of *DKR*





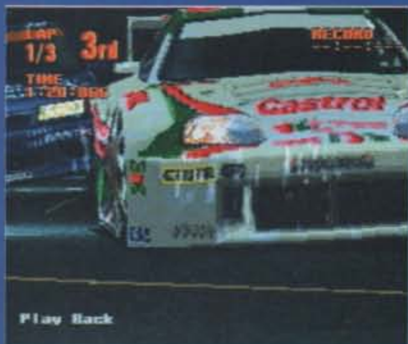
GRAN TURISMO

Rarely has there been a genre so rammed to the gunwales with examples as the PlayStation racing game, but that has not stalled a section of Sony's in-house development capacity in pushing forth with a new take on the theme. Edge presents one of the most accomplished and potentially mould-breaking attempts at capturing the exhilaration of professional motor sport. Could this be Sony Japan's big break?



Gran Turismo marks a change of direction for Sony Japan's in-house games. Titles like *Parappa the Rapper* and *Jumping Flash* may have scored it points for originality, but so far, a world-beating hit of the scale of *Tomb Raider* or *Resident Evil* has remained elusive. With *Gran Turismo*, the team that created *Motor Toon GP* is ditching the cartoon feel so beloved of the Japanese market for the detail favoured by the west and hoping at the same time to score its first international hit.

It ought to be difficult. After all, there's little in the back catalogue to suggest that the 20-strong team can make the transition. *Motor Toon GP* and its sequel were cosmetically appealing with bright colours, Loony Toons styling and some superbly imaginative features, but the handling, structure and long-term appeal all lacked finesse. *V-Rally*, the current gold standard for PlayStation racing realism, scores highly in all these areas. It's almost the complete opposite of a game like *Motor Toon GP*, which begs the question, can Sony's ▶







The car models are easily the most realistic Edge has seen on a home console – better even than Ocean's recent hit, *V-Rally*









The low camera angles and TV-style cuts make the replay mode in *Gran Turismo* worth watching from beginning to end. The specular lighting effects on the cars are simulated (with bitmaps), but effective



'I crashed my Skyline GT R on a public road. Luckily no-one was hurt; I got away with minor injuries'

◄ internal development team play against type? **Edge** was invited to SCE's headquarters in Tokyo to find out.

Kazunori Yamauchi is the project leader on *Gran Turismo*, and seems eminently qualified for the job. He's been living and breathing racing games for almost five years, working on the original *Motor Toon GP* and the sequel before heading up the newly assembled *GT* team in the Autumn of 1996. The idea, to produce a game that allowed the player to race production cars, had already been in Yamauchi's 'to do' folder for four years by the time SCE gave it the go ahead. Like seemingly all Japanese developers involved in racing games, Yamauchi's love of cars extends well beyond the confines of a console.

'At one point during the production of *Gran Turismo* I couldn't tell the difference between the real world and the game world,' he laughs. 'I ended up crashing my Skyline GT R on a public road. Luckily, no-one was hurt, and I escaped with minor injuries, but my car was completely destroyed. In fact, I'm still paying for that crash. I owe the money on the car, whether it's in pieces or not.'

Anyone familiar with the Nissan Skyline GT R will know that you'd have to be some kind of racing nut to drive one. It may lack the visual flair of a Ferrari or a TVR, but it could keep up with models from both manufacturers without breaking a sweat. Unsurprisingly, the Skyline is featured in the game, along with a whole host of other overpowered road cars from Chrysler, Chevrolet, Mazda, Mitsubishi and Subaru, with British brands TVR and Aston Martin injecting a much-needed element of class. In all, *Gran Turismo* offers no less than 87 different models to race – an encyclopedic selection that is very much a reflection of Yamauchi's long-time obsession with production cars the world over – an obsession that has shaped not just car selection but the bewildering array of options available to anyone who eschews the quick-







***Gran Turismo* is a long way from *Motor Toon GP*. Product manager Kazunori Yamauchi (centre in photo, below right) dreamt of creating a racing title that would allow players to drive sports production cars. The team wrote off two cars during its production. Yamauchi was lucky to escape with his life...**

race Arcade mode for the Gran Turismo mode.

Players begin with limited funds with which to buy a new or second-hand car from any one of the aforementioned manufacturers. Second-hand cars come in limited colours, and any part of the vehicle may be customised, from changing the wheels to adding turbochargers. Once car selection is complete (and it could take some time) a number of submodes appear that lead eventually to one of the ten tracks. In keeping with the kitchen-sink realism of the game, players may choose the unusual Licence mode, a sort of super-charged driving test, complete with cones and emergency stops. The Championship mode, meanwhile, is split into 'Central' and 'Special'. Central offers a number of different environments and conditions to race in, while Special confines the race to either front-wheel, rear-wheel or four-wheel drive cars. Even the Time Trial mode is laden with options, providing 400- and 1,000-metre races, a speed cup, Japanese vs US cars, Japanese vs UK, and an extended 300km race. The type of race entered will be determined to a great extent by the type of vehicle available to the player at the time. With this level of detail, it could ▶



Anyone familiar with the Skyline GT R will know that you'd have to be some kind of nut to drive one







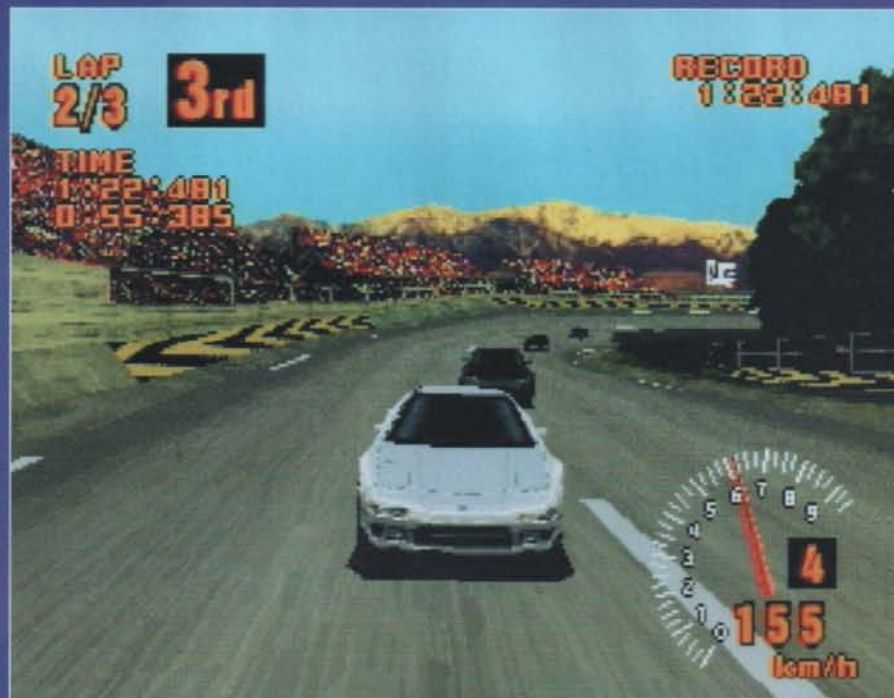
The highly effective lighting models, coupled with the hyper-realistic handling, give *Gran Turismo* a polished, coin-op-style quality







Gran Turismo sports a bewildering array of options to customise new and used cars



The reverse-cam view reveals the opposition: there are 87 different cars to race in *Gran Turismo*, and each has its own unique handling characteristics, reflected in four-wheel independent suspension

'Yokouchi wrote his car off in a spectacular fashion. I'm not sure whether that helped the game or not'

◀ hardly be further from the cartoon slapstick of *Motor Toon GP*.

'Well,' Yamauchi muses, 'the team isn't exactly the same. The lead programmer is different, as well as one of the designers, but we did use a part of the original *Motor Toon* engine. *Gran Turismo* uses a part of the physics model used in *Motor Toon*.'

Akihiko Tan is the man behind the physics model. Though the graphics are certainly impressive, it is ultimately the feel and drive of the cars that determines whether a game like *Gran Turismo* is regarded as a classic or merely yet another PlayStation racing game. The physics simulation model has been four years in the making (hence the *Motor Toon* lineage), but the results **Edge** has witnessed justify the long development process. Each of the car's four wheels is independently modelled, which gives the cars an incredibly realistic response. Watch another car hit a curb, for example, and the front wheels bounce first, throwing the bonnet up. On corners, the cars lean over and smoke billows from screeching tyres. Should players clip a corner and wind up on the grass, the car fights for grip in vain until hitting the tarmac once again. Realism, according to Yamauchi-san, was not the original objective.

'That wasn't the approach we took,' he explains. 'Reality was not the main focus. Instead of starting from the scientific angle, we started from the desire to build cars that could really be driven, in a very tactile way. We knew that if we could succeed at that, then we would make a realistic game. It's a different kind of approach.'

The team applied the same logic to the environment mapping, yielding pixel-perfect shadows and some clever reflections courtesy of a sprite-mapping technique which maps specular glints and gleams onto the cars' bodywork. It's only a small detail, but it looks impressive without hitting the frame rate, and makes replays worth watching, so realistic is the impression it generates. Looking back at the *Motor Toon* games, it's hard to see how this small team could put something quite so water-tight together in just 12 months. Perhaps the real-life racing that the team engaged in was a factor. Yamauchi-san looks a little rueful at this, as he recalls environment mapping programmer Takeshhi Yokouchi mapping a test car inadvertently on to the environment.

'Well, we did perform a lot of real tests. We rented out more than 30 cars to test the driving feel, and to take some sound samples. Takeshi Yokouchi also crashed his car and wrote it off in spectacular fashion. I'm not sure whether that helped the game or not...'

Whatever it was, the change of pace seems to suit them...





One of the most impressive features of the game is the complex environment-mapping, which casts shadows on to the many cars


OF SATURN


OF SATURN
TM
EDGE INVESTIGATES SEGA'S BASTION
OF THE 32BIT GAMING UNDERGROUND

◀ The PlayStation's mainstream success is remarkable. Sony's seemingly tireless effort in promoting its platform to the masses is admirable; it is the closest a hardware manufacturer has come to creating a videogaming standard. But for many connoisseurs, the Saturn is the machine of choice – or at the very least a valued second format.

A considerable amount of Saturn sales can be attributed to that elusive entity known as brand loyalty. A number of Mega Drive owners, fond of their 16bit hardware and software collection, bought Sega's 32bit machine because they did (or do) own its predecessor. With no *Sonic* game to establish the link between the two platforms, Sega has been fortunate to profit from early-'90s marketing that made its name synonymous with gaming.

For many connoisseurs the Saturn is the machine of choice – or at the very least a valued second format



The 32X add-on for the Mega Drive was an embarrassing farrago that alienated even the most diehard Sega fans

The Saturn's hardware was maligned well before its launch, with unfair (and ill-judged) comparisons with Sony's PlayStation suggesting a technical gulf that isn't nearly as wide as was initially suggested. Sega's decision to opt for powerful sprite-handling capabilities over polygon shifting is regarded by many as an unfortunate error by the Japanese giant. However, this could also be regarded as the fault of the industry as a whole.

The automatic assumption that the advent of machines capable of shifting large quantities of polygons has marked the flatlining of the 2D advancement curve is mistaken. In Japan, where 2D beat 'em ups are still enormously popular and sprite-based RPGs are forever in demand, the situation is different; the Saturn is held in much higher regard than in Europe and the USA. Releases from Capcom, SNK and Treasure, amongst others, are eagerly awaited; many Japanese otaku would find the almost exclusive obsession western gamers have with 3D surprising, even nerdish.

Sega's releases – in particular its arcade conversions – have rarely failed to impress. The Saturn can boast one of the best beat 'em ups for a home format in *Fighters Megamix*; similarly, *Sega Rally* is a racing title with few peers. But its Saturn-specific development is also worthy of great credit. The wistful *NiGHTS* is technically and aesthetically sublime, but many of the uninitiated struggled to appreciate the subtlety of its gameplay. Others, however, believe it to be one of the finest console games ever created.

Frequently, thirdparty software developed outside Japan has been of a disappointing standard. This has almost certainly contributed to the Saturn's poor performance in the west. Sega alienated prominent American publishers by bringing the Saturn launch forward from September to May 1995. With the existing deadlines tight, rescheduling crucial releases to coincide with the revised street date was simply not an option.

Yet, strangely, after infuriating American software houses by depriving them of the chance to compete for early adopters' cash, Sega made the same mistake in Europe. Significantly, the all-important PAL conversion of *Daytona USA* was a disaster. With borders to make a widescreen movie blush, its shortcomings were all too apparent. Of the four titles available, only *Virtua Fighter* gained any great amount of critical acclaim – *Clockwork Knight* and *International Victory Goal* were, even by 1995 standards, mediocre.





The Saturn's original guts (left) looked like a Maplins self-assembly job with a vast array of off-the-shelf components. Later models became more integrated





Daytona USA (above) wasn't the killer app the Saturn needed to square up to the PlayStation. *Virtua Fighter 2* (left) came too late to rescue the machine's credibility

Most thirdparty developers have struggled with the Saturn from day one. In more fortunate instances, titles converted from or developed in tandem with PlayStation projects have retained essential playability even if they lack visual accomplishment. But, lamentably, many ports lack both. The likes of *Sega Rally* and *Virtua Fighter 2* tell one tale, but the murky textures and glitchy engines of many thirdparty releases attest to another. If clipping and pop-up are to be the colour clash of the '90s, then by that token the Saturn is the equivalent of the Sinclair Spectrum.

Developers are keen to point the finger at Sega, criticising its lack of support. It has been alleged that Sega of Japan kept the strongest libraries to itself at first, leaving codeshops to either use the inferior tools provided or spend time producing their own. In contrast, Sony's handling of thirdparty developers has been exemplary from day one. By providing extensive libraries and technical support for external developers, they removed a considerable burden from the shoulders of coders hard pushed by publishers to get software out of development kits and on to shelves.

'One thing that is true is that the Saturn didn't get the same tools or library support from Sega that the PlayStation did from Sony,' comments **John Edelson**, Argonaut's general manager. 'We spent a lot of time writing original libraries for 3D, for audio, and for accessing CD.

'Developing for the Saturn is difficult, it's got to be said. The libraries have needed a lot of work and the larger community of PlayStation programmers and PC programmers that help people get through those games doesn't really exist on the Saturn. In a company like ours, the Saturn programmers feel isolated, and there aren't as many resources devoted to them. So it's true, it's been hard for them.'

Naohiko Hoshino, associate general manager at Sega Japan, agrees. 'Sure, things could always be better,' he admits. 'The fact that the architecture of the Saturn is complicated has not helped and has allowed claims like this to be made. Maybe developers are using this as an excuse because they do not have the time to match the achievements of some of Sega's own teams. It is inevitable that most companies are business driven and sometimes financial issues come before creative freedom.'

The Saturn still enjoys a great deal of success in Japan, where it continues to occupy the number two spot above the Nintendo 64. The Mega Drive was a failure in Sega's home market, which is why Sega's Coleridge-stlye albatross – the ill-conceived, SOA-developed 32X – didn't drain Sega Japan's resources as it did the USA subsidiary. Sony has courted developers successfully worldwide, but, Hoshino states, 'Sega [Japan] did the same with many Japanese developers like Game Arts, Warp, Treasure, and Climax. The situation in Europe and the US was different around that time [1994] Sega was trying to gather developer support for the 32X. In hindsight this was a mistake.'

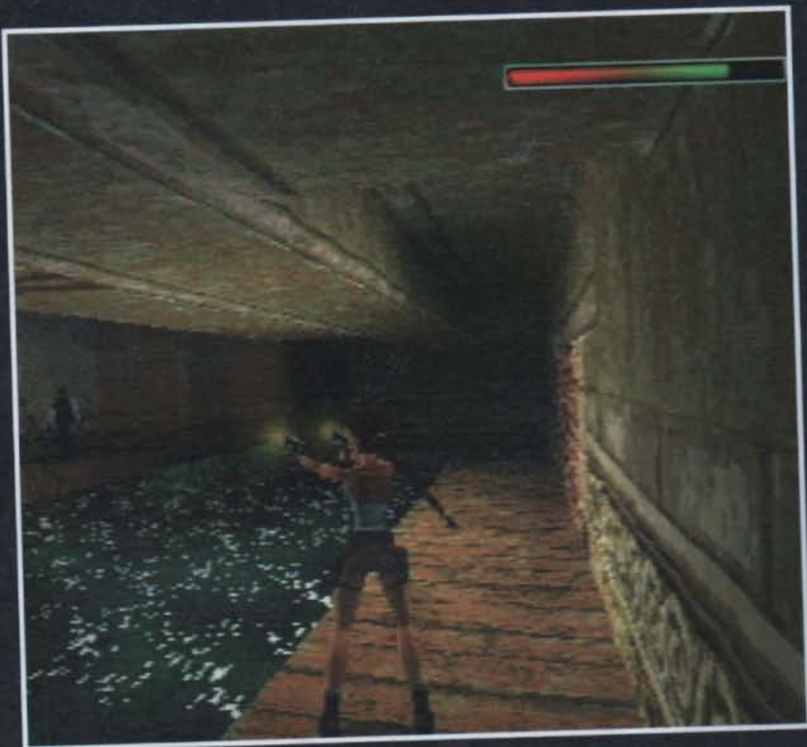
Another problem for Sega is that publishers are almost desperate to get PlayStation software to the sell-in stage. If this means sacrificing Saturn development to do so – as was rumoured to be the ▶







Three of the finest videogames ever to be released on a console (from left): *Sega Rally*, *Fighters Megamix*, and *NiGHTS*. Even with titles of this quality, though, Sega has struggled in the face of a hugely successful marketing drive from Sony





The Saturn may have some promising titles on the way, including *Panzer Dragoon Saga* (above), but the absence of Core's *Tomb Raider 2* (left) is a major blow for the format

◂ case with Core's *Tomb Raider 2* – the loss of sales for the black box are potentially dwarfed by those for the grey should a title go on sale late.

'The Saturn is demanding,' reckons Edelson. 'Many companies find themselves short of technical resources, so they double up on the lead version of a product and cut the Saturn release, often as an excuse to cover up the fact that they didn't have enough technical resources.

'There are a lot of customers out there that have bought the Saturn. They've had a pretty good ride, they've had good software... they really appreciate good effort, and I think we've made that with *Croc*.'

Indeed, 'effort' appears to be a key word where Saturn development is concerned, as Naohiko Hoshino agrees: 'Yes, the Saturn is not the easiest machine to develop for, but those who persevere can obtain great results. I should say that business decisions are involved too. If the management cannot give the programmers enough time then the results will not be as good...'

Gallup's software charts have shown Saturn software sales to be in region of eight per cent of total videogame sales for a large part of 1997. PlayStation game sales have continued to climb. The arrival of the N64 in the marketplace has further complicated matters for Sega; retailers, recognising this gap, have cut Saturn shelf space. Thus begins a self-fulfilling prophesy; with walls full of PlayStation software and a growing N64 library, Sega's machine is removed from the public eye.

Many large software chains have reduced store space for the Saturn, and independents also report little demand. Virgin Our Price dropped the format towards the end of 1996, and in a number of Electronics Boutique stores the Saturn rivals only the Amiga in terms of shelf space.





***Dragon Force* (top) and *Grandia*: two more feathers in Sega's cap**

HMV's **Steve Alexander** singles out the 32X and Mega CD as turning points in Sega's fortunes. 'This is where things went wrong for Sega,' he believes. 'I hardly need to explain the way people felt about those add-ons – both customers and retailers were left with a bad taste in the mouth. To this day, both have neither forgotten nor forgiven.

'I knew Sega were in for a hard time the day Sony released its machine. On that fateful Friday I knew Sony had stolen the ground from beneath its rival. And when Sega reps came into our stores we laughed them out. Everyone did.'

This Christmas is make or break for Sega. While Sega Japan is forecasted to enjoy an upturn in fortunes with the long-awaited release of *Grandia* and *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, the company's position in America and Europe is exponentially more delicate. Sega Europe has 14 releases planned from between the end of September and the start of January. Of these, only *Touring Car*, *Sonic R* and *Quake* could be described as potential killer apps. Despite others, like *Enemy Zero* and *Last Bronx*, being quality titles, Sega has no real resources to raise awareness of this fact.

Possibly the biggest blow to Sega is Ms Croft's absence from its schedules. Without the *Tomb Raider 2* conversion, Sega stands not only to fail to profit from the Eidos marketing push, it also stands to lose owners exasperated by the non-arrival of important thirdparty titles. For European Saturn owners there is no Konami, no Psygnosis, no Eidos. Electronic Arts is cutting development and Virgin has pruned all but affiliate titles. Elsewhere outside the Sega stable, the situation is similarly bleak.

But, in the UK, the Saturn offers incredible value for money at £100. Its back catalogue is varied; from RPGs to coin-op conversions, almost every taste is catered for. And, although thirdparty support has all but disappeared, Sega has over 40 games pencilled in for release next year, including *Burning Rangers*, *Grandia* and, possibly, *Virtua Fighter 3*.

The Saturn, casualty of the second-generation 32bit console war, is neither 3DO nor Jaguar. It boasts arcade conversions that Namco rivals but rarely beats, classy RPGs, and support from offbeat developers such as Treasure – it is, in short, the hardcore gamer's machine of the '90s. In this sense, Sega's failure is also its greatest triumph. **E**

How to sell the 'second best'...



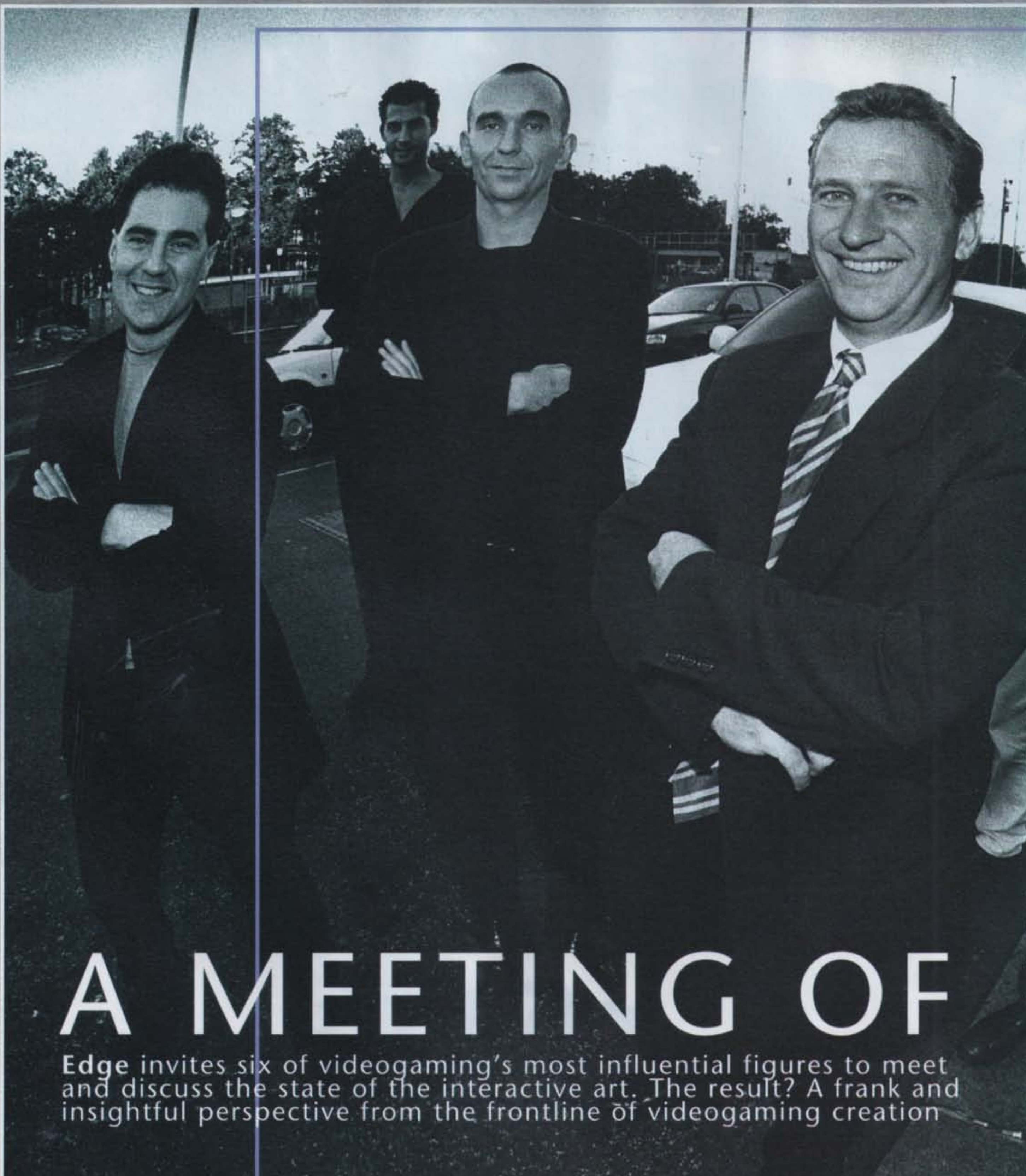
Edge spoke to Jo Bladen, Sega's UK marketing director (replacing Andy Mee), in order to learn the corporate view of the machine's prospects

Edge: The Saturn is regarded by many as a machine for the 'enthusiast'. Is Sega happy with this label?
JB: Yes, the Saturn has evolved into a real 'gamers' machine. The Saturn owner wants more from his console with in-depth, quality role-playing games and quality arcade conversions. Gameplay is the most important feature, as it should be for any game. This will be our unique selling point; 100% quality gameplay is what we provide. The software to hardware ratio of 4:1 indicates that our owners buy more software than any other console – only when titles are consistently of a high quality can a company maintain this kind of strong ratio. However, as the console is now at the competitive price of £99.99, with a great library of software priced from £19.99, it makes it an ideal present and gives wider appeal for the Christmas market.
Edge: Who will Sega be aiming at with its Christmas marketing? Will it be to a broad spectrum of potential buyers, or will you concentrate specifically on the real videogame enthusiasts?
JB: The Christmas marketing campaign will be targeted at core games users and potential new entrants to the market. Sega has the strongest console line-up for this quarter and easily the best-value console price. The market will divide into the more mainstream titles such as *Sonic*, *Worldwide Soccer* and *Touring Car* and the targeted core gamers with *Duke Nukem* and *Quake* – each one very strong in its own market.

Therefore we will buy space on television to reach the mass market with football and motor racing and procede from there to key targeted gamers' programmes such as *The Simpsons* and the *X-Files*. Support adverts in the national press will communicate the key line-up message and continue to build the brand. In the wider picture we're also associating the brand with key football matches and motor sport events to reach not only the loyal Sega consumer but potential new entrants to the market through parental gift purchase. We'll be targetting the younger user with the strength of the Sonic character.
Edge: How many Saturns have been sold in the UK to date?
JB: Approximately 450,000.
Edge: How many Saturns does Sega expect to sell this Christmas?
JB: This is currently being reviewed, as sales have increased over the past few weeks.
Edge: Edge has noticed a surprisingly high quantity of dual PlayStation/Saturn ownership – that people buy a PlayStation for the Psygnosis/Namco/thirdparty games and a Saturn for the Sega titles. Many, in fact, express the Saturn as their preferred format. How does Sega regard this? Would you say this confirms the Saturn's position as a machine for the videogaming enthusiast?
JB: Our internal research and database information shows this trend is increasing. There are many people now that own both machines, mainly as the low price points mean that if you want to play exclusive Sega games then £99.99 for the console is a low barrier to entry. The Playstation is well-hyped, but once people have played on the Saturn and seen certain games available for it, you'll find it hard to say one machine is better than the other. Many gamers still maintain that *Sega Rally* is the best game ever – we'll not dispute that!

Sega's games have a rich heritage and when titles like *Crash Bandicoot* are dead and buried, people will still be playing *Sega Rally* all over Europe. If we can maintain this strength and quality of gameplay, Sega and its consoles will continue selling.
Edge: Do you think the current speculation concerning Sega's next hardware launch is harming the Saturn? Isn't there a danger that this could scare off potential buyers?
JB: Mere speculation, that's all it is. Why should the consumer be aware or put off by this? The price and position of the Saturn for this Christmas will ensure that any speculation does not affect sales. The Saturn is at a mass-market price – the speculation is mainly coming through the Internet and business sources, and the average consumer will not necessarily have access to this information. Remember that Sega itself has made no announcements whatsoever other than to stress its commitment to the Saturn. It's a great value 32bit console with a strong library of titles for all ages, tastes and gaming ability.
Edge: Presumably there are no plans for another drop in the Saturn's retail price...
JB: The Saturn is already at a very good and competitive price for Christmas. There will be some very strong bundles out at retail which will help to make this a very good year for the Saturn and ensure we maintain the number two position in the UK console market. Having such a strong range of quality games priced from £19.99 will provide consumers with a strong incentive to purchase.
Edge: How would you sum up the Saturn and Sega today?
JB: The Saturn has a strong place in the videogame market – being number two in the market and making profit in a financial year is something to shout about in most industries. Sega is proud to sell quality software and will continue to support the Saturn throughout 1998 with a strong line-up.

Sega was number one in the market with the Mega Drive and it will be again in the future – there is no doubt about that.



A MEETING OF

Edge invites six of videogaming's most influential figures to meet and discuss the state of the interactive art. The result? A frank and insightful perspective from the frontline of videogaming creation



A t the end of the second day of this year's ECTS, **Edge** gathered together six of videogaming's leading luminaries, sat them around a table in the show's 'premier club lounge', and invited them to share their views on the state of the industry.

The attendees, (from left to right in photograph) **Brett Sperry** of Westwood Studios, **Dave Perry** of Shiny Entertainment, **Peter Molyneux** of newly formed Lionhead Studios, MD of Core Design **Jeremy Smith**, DMA Design chief **David Jones**, and *Elite* creator **David Braben**, were happy to mull over many aspects of what has become one of the world's most valuable – and *valued* by those who take part in it – entertainment mediums.

The interview wasn't exactly the easiest **Edge** has ever conducted (what with the constant threat of being ejected from Olympia, ECTS's venue, as the words kept coming and the clock kept ticking), but this meeting of minds was a landmark in the magazine's history. **Edge** hopes it proves enlightening reading.

Originality: a lost cause?

Edge: Looking around ECTS today, the amount of clones and 'me-too' titles seems to be more prevalent than ever. Why do you feel the videogames industry has developed in this fashion?

David Braben: The risk factor seems to drive certain companies more than others. A return on the investment and balancing the spreadsheet is seen as more important than gameplay. If you're trying to sell a game to a publisher, the first thing they ask is, 'What's it like? What other game is it similar to? Is it like *Command & Conquer*?' And you find yourself being subtly driven down a certain route. That's why we've got 68 million *C&C* clones.

Edge: So what do you see as being the solution?

Dave Perry: We're getting around it at Shiny by just making something different – just doing it. At the moment, everyone's scratching their heads trying to figure out what to do next. We're doing a model helicopter simulator. It's never been done before, and the people that have played it go on for hours – they love it. But the problem is convincing a publisher that it's viable, because it looks nothing like *Tomb Raider*.

Peter Molyneux: You can't blame the marketing people, though. Developers just have to be less lazy – they have to go out and get the press ▶



'We need time. Speak to most developers and they'll tell you 18 months is the average. I think it's terrible to enforce that on people' David Jones

excited about an idea. Then the marketing people can see it's viable and that people are really interested. You really can't expect anybody who's seen the tremendous figures of *Command & Conquer* and *Tomb Raider* to take any other attitude. We can produce original games, and we *will* produce original games.

Edge: Perhaps the answer is to shrink the resources, use smaller teams. That would take the financial pressure off.

DP: We're reducing the risk with *Fly By Wire* by having a two-man team. We're taking the gamble. We've been in all these arguments with programmers who say we're all lazy and don't try to make new genres, and what do they go and do? They go and make another *Quake* clone. So we're taking a risk with this game, but we've tried to cut down on the risk by having two people make the game. If it looks like it's going to be a hit, and the press are all leaping up and down, then we'll hire the rest of the people needed to get it finished and polished.

Edge: Brett, how do you feel about Westwood having made *Command & Conquer* – just about the most copied game around.

Brett Sperry: You were asking the question earlier: how do we get around it? And the real challenge for the development community is to look at the established genres and try to figure out how to take the next step. *Command & Conquer* was borne of a perceived gap in the market – that started with *Dune 2*, actually, and the premise was, well, strategy games are fun, but that fun is rarely realised, so what can we do? And that's difficult. I don't know what the initial motivation was to create *Populous*, but it was probably borne of that same theory. It's a very difficult thing to do.

Edge: What about originality and sequels? Jeremy – Core is currently finishing *Tomb Raider 2*, but it doesn't look like it'll be much different from the original...

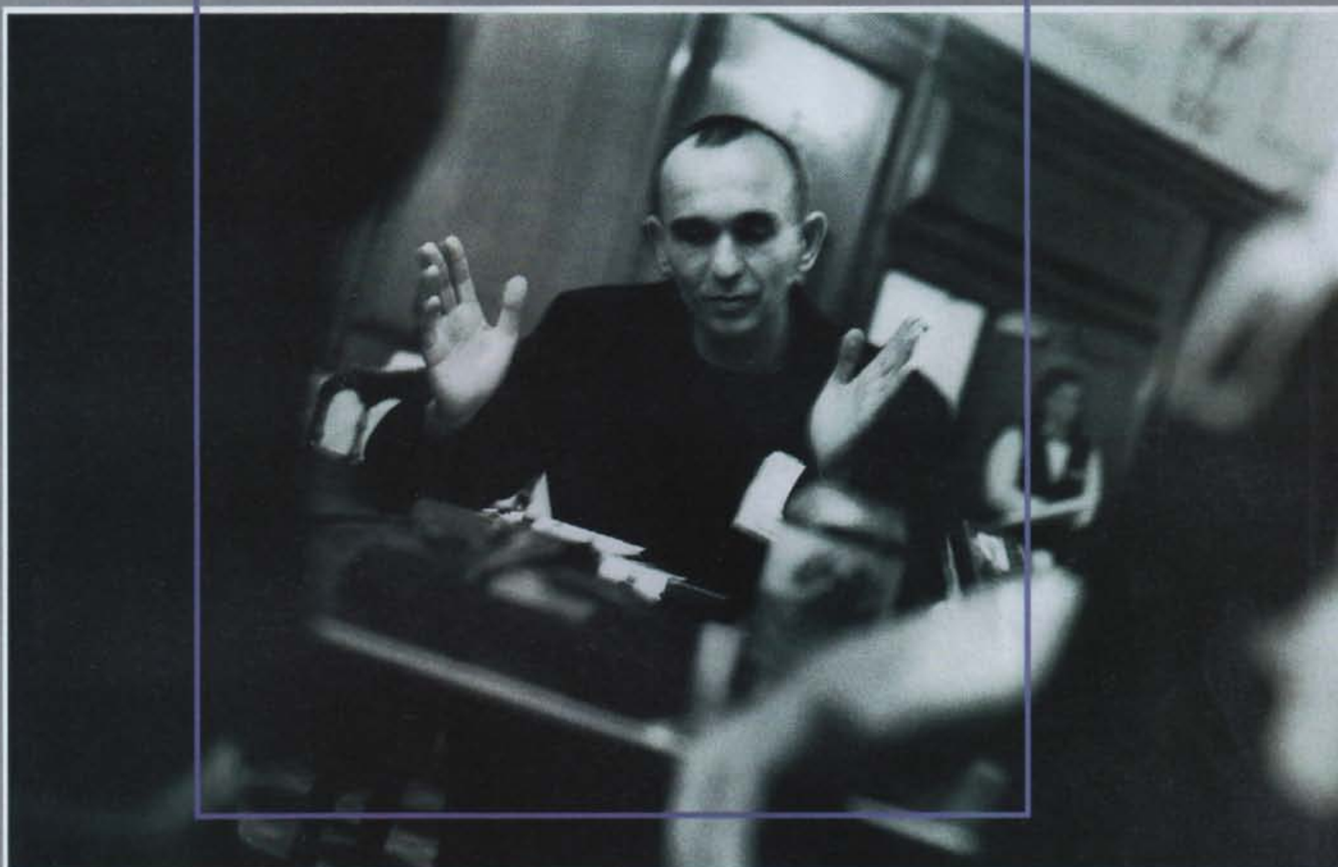
Jeremy Smith: The success of *Tomb Raider* means that people want more. *Tomb Raider 2* is 50 per cent again. The engine is 50 per cent new, with dynamic lighting and outside areas. We felt that advancing the engine was justifiable. The problem now is the question of *Tomb Raider 3*. We don't really know where else we can take it, in its current form.

Edge: But do you *want* to do it?

JS: Well, the demand is there. The consumers want it. If they didn't, then they wouldn't have bought three-and-a-half million copies of the game. The question is, where do you stop? We currently have a couple of guys beavering away on a product for a younger demographic. The market is there for 7-12 year olds, but no-one is addressing it other than Nintendo. You take that game to the board of directors, though, and they just look at you. But that market has to come.

Edge: How would a board of directors react to a game like, say, *Grand Theft Auto*, then?

David Jones: But that game was done out of passion. Every time we sit down and say we want to write something, we have to convince ourselves it's different. It was a hard slog to get publishers to accept that. The game also took a long time, and not that many people are willing to commit that length of time to a product. Originality takes time. We can write something in 18 months, but personally I want another 18 months on top of that to make it original, to put all the stuff in that I want. You try getting anyone to approve a three-year timescale – most publishers would have a fit!



PM: Oh, don't say three years... [Laughter all round]
DJ: We need time. Speak to most developers and publishers and they'll tell you 18 months is the average. I think its terrible to force that on people. You can't just create a bigger team. In fact, you're better off with small teams – say, three or four guys for three years.
Edge: But doesn't that kind of extended timescale leave you open to technology issues? The PC market, for example, seems to be in constant flux at the moment. Who knows what graphics card you'll be writing to in three years time?
DJ: That is a problem, and I'm personally looking forward to a bit more stability in technology so that we don't have to worry about that. We presented *GTA* two-and-a-half years ago, and we could've done that game in 3D, but it wouldn't have been the same. In fact I remember the publisher, halfway through the cycle, saying, Could you switch that to 3D? And we said no, because you can't just do that. It becomes something different.
Edge: Is there a common denominator to be found in the way that games like *Command and Conquer*, *Populous*, or *Tomb Raider* are created? The 'originality recipe'?
PM: The common denominator, I would guess, is passion. Everyone says, Well, why aren't games better – why aren't there more really good games? And I think that the answer is that what this industry doesn't do, amazingly, is play the games that it makes. We create a game, we ask the teams to work all the hours God sends, and we don't give them time to play the game. That's really what makes the difference – sitting down and playing for hours and hours and hours. I know that happened with *Quake*, and I know that it happens with Japanese games and it happens with my own games. Unless you've got the time to play it, you can't figure out those little touches that make a game special. Like Brett said, you can look at established genres and see things people aren't looking at now, rather than writing down, 'I'm going to do an original game today, and it's going to have these elements'.

Laying the blame

Edge: So where does the blame fall? Is it with producers, who actually frown upon people simply playing their games instead of coding them, on a daily basis?
PM: I heard an interesting story the other day about that kind of thing. There was an American journalist, I think, who was questioning John Romero's role in the development of *Quake*, and he said that all John Romero did all day was play deathmatch. You don't have to sit down at a keyboard these days and be responsible for all the coding and the graphics. What you *do* need is the guts and the tenacity and the willpower to turn something boring into something very interesting and motivating – and that really takes a *lot* of willpower.
DB: The point about the passion thing is that you have to be creating the game for yourself, not for some imaginary market. It has to be something you would want to play. There's something about seeing everything planned out on a schedule for a game that really kills it. Schedules that say how many days you're going to work on this shape, and how many days you're going to work on this effect – it stifles ▶



creativity. The way that we're trying to go is to develop the game to a showable state and then talk to publishers and marketing people. Then you have the completion period, which is scheduled. But the problem I was trying to get at earlier is that it's very hard for a new developer to come in on the scene and produce something that can compete with things that have had a whole load of speculative development. Dave's helicopter game, for example; he has the luxury of time and money to kick that idea around for a while and see where it goes.

Edge: Are developers restricted by technology as much as they are freed by it?

BS: It's very, very easy to be seduced by the technology and forget some of the fundamentals. We see it time and time again, in our own studios, you always have a couple of programmers who think, Hey, this is great – 3Dfx, let's go for it! You have to ask, is the game in here, or is this just self-indulgence?

Edge: Everyone seems to agree that the whole accelerator card explosion has helped the PC enormously, but if it has, then why are people still bemoaning the lack of gameplay?

PM: I think one reason is that the world is a very different place now, and what we're talking about here are original games. Larger companies aren't so good at that. The other reason is that it's easier to get away with flashy stuff. I don't know if there's any truth in this, but if you look back over the development cycle of games over the last ten to 15 years, I reckon that about the same amount of time is being spent now on gameplay as was spent originally. Back in the days of the Commodore 64, to make a game special, you had to concentrate on the gameplay because the graphics were shit and the hardware wasn't up to much, so you really had to have gameplay for it to stand out. Now you don't have to do that. You can be much more lazy about it now that the 3D accelerators are around.

JS: But that technology just exposes crap games.

DB: I've seen a lot of games I think look very good, but play very badly. I can name some if you want...

JS: But so many bad games are just hyped, with a great licence, and sell so many units, which is why this business can be so difficult to figure out. Look at the last *FIFA* game, for instance, released at Christmas. It's 'granny money' that buys it – not the guy that reads magazines, because the magazines said 'don't buy it'.

Sex and adult games

Edge: Can the market be educated?

JS: I'm not sure they want educating. The trouble is that they want sex, they want Lara Croft on the front. They don't want wizards and thieves and they don't want a helicopter, because that's dull. As a developer, you get a thousand questions that say, Well, what's the inspiration behind Lara Croft, and why are her tits so big? Well, the game's great. Ignore her, and play the game. If you'd have put a guy in that game instead, it would still have been a great game, but would it have sold as many, and been as popular with the media? No, probably not.

Edge: So, do breasts sell games as well as newspapers now?

DP: We have a prostitute character in *Messiah*. It's the first game where you get to kill hookers. There have been girls in games for a long time, but Lara set the breast size to 'large'

and that changed everything. The technology is there now to make a woman look like a woman – long hair versus short hair.

Edge: Does the industry need to cater for what has supposedly become a more mature market, and look more towards games that don't feature super-cute characters and flowers with smiley faces?

BS: I don't think that's a decision that guides a game's development. If an idea happens to target a younger audience then that's fine. If it's sound and entertaining, that's the important thing, but I don't think we're consciously or overtly trying to make games that appeal to 18-year-olds or 25-year-olds per se.

DP: We're all getting older, though. As a group we're getting older and that in itself is changing my attitudes as well. I'd find it very hard to do a real 'cutesy' style game. Nowadays I look at things more seriously. I've played all the *Doom* games and various others. Violence has happened, sex has happened. The industry is definitely changing and that has changed us. In making the games we want to play, inevitably the games are becoming more twisted and weird than they used to be. I don't think it's a bad thing, but I think that certainly for those young seven and eight year olds that are strolling into the marketplace have less choice than they used to have. There's not much in the way of *Mario* clones, but there's a lot of death and mayhem.

JS: There's not a lot of choice for the younger kids, unless they go the Nintendo route. *Croc* is a good example. With the money Fox is spending on *Croc*, it will probably help to bring the demographic of the PlayStation down. At the moment, the average age of PlayStation owners is 21, and they don't want to play 'cutesy' games.

Videogames as toys

Edge: Isn't the changing demographic more to do with the price of the system, which is now low enough to make it an affordable 'toy', and available to younger gamers?

JS: Yes, it will get younger, but already we're moving on to the next thing. We're always chasing the hardware, aren't we? We're always moving on, and we're getting older.

DB: But that shouldn't matter. If you look at toy companies that make squeaky dolls and that kind of thing, they're all business executives that are running the companies, but they still make toys that work for kids.

Edge: You made the point earlier that you need passion to make a game any good. Surely, the game you're making has to appeal to you, as a developer. So as you get older, maybe it's right that you make games with a conscious appeal to older gamers?

DB: I can see that, but I thoroughly enjoyed *Super Mario 64*.

Edge: Has a game ever been successful because of its adult theme, or just despite of it?

DB: I think that *Super Mario 64* goes across the board.

PM: I don't think it matters a damn. I agree with what Jeremy was saying about Lara. She did help to sell the game, but if *Tomb Raider* had been crap, you probably would've got a bit excited, looked around for a while and then moved on. I don't know if we need to pay more attention to content – maybe we should – but we really just produce games that we want to play.

DJ: It's actually a really good experience to have to go out of your way designing a game for another audience. When we started working with Nintendo, we'd always done games that we wanted to in the Amiga and PC market.

Edge: *Silicon Valley* is a pretty 'cutesy' title...

DJ: Yeah, *Silicon Valley* was targeted like that, and I found it ten times the amount of work when Nintendo came back and said, 'You're not thinking about the demographic – not thinking like a seven year old.' It's so tough. Nintendo can do it, and it can be done, but you have to really try. If you're designing for Nintendo, and they're hammering it home every time they see you, then it becomes a ▶

'Nowadays I look at things more seriously. Violence has happened, sex has happened. The industry is changing and that has changed us' Dave Perry



job. We shouldn't kid ourselves. The whole thing about gameplay is that it is not easy, and it's not a natural thing. I can sit six programmers down and say, 'Give me a car physics engine,' and five of them will be complete crap. Now why is that? Why haven't they got it right? Why can't they get the feel right? I could shrink our company to ten people, probably, and have the best team in the world because I know the guys that really get it.

DP: The magical, kiddie world is all very well, but what the public

'The Japanese are very used to characterisation. Everything there has a face on it. Even condom machines have little smiley faces'

Peter Molyneux

actually wants is the violence. If you had *Mario Kart* and you could get Mario to fall out of his kart and you could run over him, then kids would be trying to do that all the time. That would be the best part of the game for them. Luckily, Nintendo say, No, that's not going to happen. But the reality is that, as a gamer, I'd drive over Mario if I could.

PM: And reverse back over him... [Laughter all round]

DP: There you go! Peter's just taken it to the next level, right there. Whenever you create something like that, as we have in *MDK* with the sniper mode, if you give people the choice of shooting someone anywhere on their body, versus the old games where they just throw a bullet out there and the thing dies, they really dig it. The only people that are going to stop that is us – by saying that we're not going to allow people to play this game to the level they'd like to.

BS: Why should we say that? The point is to give people the opportunity to do and see things and be in a world which is, perhaps, socially unacceptable. That's very tempting. People love socially unacceptable behaviour in their games. On one level, it might be morbid to go around shooting people in a game, but on another it's a release – a healthy thing. But, as entertainers, and as people who create something that's fun, that will always be a rich and exciting area to explore. You have to decide whether or not you want to be socially responsible, or even whether that enters into the art. For some of us, who do it for the art, it's not a question of whether it's socially responsible. That doesn't really enter into the equation.

Edge: Do you think it should?

BS: Maybe as realism becomes more and more attainable, that will become a real concern. But today, as realistic as they are, they still have a sort of cartoon aspect that you can't take too seriously. You do begin to glimpse the future, though, and there will come a time when we do brush up against that, and perhaps it will become a serious concern. But you could look at the example set by movies and books and see that there will always be those people who are successful who explore the taboo. Why did the VCR really catch on? Was it because people could watch pornography in their homes? Socially unacceptable behaviour is something that human beings will always be attracted to.

JS: We get some pretty spooky letters about Lara from people who've bought the game. There are some strange people out there.

DP: We're calling our next game *Messiah*. You can imagine the letters that we're getting.

The key to interactivity

Edge: Isn't the reason games are violent more to do with the fact that, in terms of art, we are so primitive that when we represent characters on screen all we can really do is move them around 2D or 3D scenarios, but we can't let them have conversations – we're not advanced enough. Spacial logic, which is pretty much all we're capable of, inevitably leads to shooting and jumping.

DB: It may be that at the moment there are certain issues that haven't been addressed and blamming





things away is by far the easiest thing to program.
BS: Maybe people are inherently attracted to conflict and drama. That seems to be at the core: conflict and drama. A lot of people don't want to walk around a world and plant seeds. It's fun to see things blow up, and it's exciting to get into a jump jet and see it take off. It's an exciting moment, a thrill.
DB: What I prefer is the much more detailed, rich world where that's a factor and there are other ways around a problem. I like the sort of game that you can go back to and try different solutions to the same problem. As for Peter's point, about reversing over Mario, it seems to me there are two ways that you could do it. You could have Mario with tyre tracks over him – a cartoon-flat Mario that just pops back into shape, or you can have his intestines hanging out and blood spewing everywhere. I think the first is acceptable, but not the second.
Edge: Characterisation is considered by the Japanese, who most people agree make the best games, to be of paramount importance, but it seems to be something that western developers have trouble with.
PM: I think that the Japanese are very used to characterisation. If you go to Japan you see that everything has a face on it. Even condom machines have little smiley faces. It's a lot easier for them because that characterisation is really built into the society. Everything is made softer, more smiley and nicer. Maybe that's why we're not quite so good at doing it. It's very tough to do. All the games I've seen that have tried to characterise themselves have all come back looking absolutely pathetic.
Edge: Can western designers get better at it? Is there something that must be learned?
JS: Every game we work on has a character. You want that character to exist and come through in the game – but 99 per cent of the time, they don't. Once they do catch on, as Lara has, then the character becomes all-important. People are calling the game Lara Croft. It's *Tomb Raider*!
DJ: Do we have to pick up on it, though? It's like the whole American/European/Japanese game thing. I'm fed up with people saying to me, 'Well, your game's nice, but it's not going to sell in America – you'll have to change it to appeal to the American audience.'
PM: It's really tough. I don't think there's any English company that's ever really done it in America. *Dungeon Keeper* is number two at the moment in the States, and I think it's the highest charting game that EA has ever had. I'm very proud of this fact, I have to say... [Laughs] America is such a tough market.
BS: Part of that is xenophobia. As part of my role at Virgin I come over and try to make the European development teams realise the importance of courting the press. Why do our games not do well in Japan? It's not anything to do with us not creating the right games, it's because you're shut out of the market by the press.
PM: The Japanese press is just very hard to do. You can't just go to them and say, 'Here you go, guys, here's a great game'. You've got to get drunk with them, sing karaoke with them...
DP: Getting back to the character thing, at Shiny we spend a lot of time developing characters. It's probably one of our core things that we do. The reality is that when you're ▶



◄ designing the characters most companies just chuck some 'jumpy boy' into the game and they've got themselves a *Croc* or whatever, and the problem is that they then leave it there. Why didn't that become a TV show? Because you stopped. You made your game and you just stopped. We have guys at Shiny whose job it is to take care of the characters. They make pictures, sculptures, bibles and attitude sheets and they do all this crap that you need to do to fill out the character

'We get some pretty spooky letters about Lara Croft from people who've played *Tomb Raider*. There are some strange people out there'
Jeremy Smith

and, by extension, make it easy for a television studio to understand what you have. It's extra work, and it's insanely boring, but it's worth it. You don't want to think about what your character might say first thing in the morning, but you *have* to think about it, and give them an attitude about everything in life. I mean, what's Lara Croft's bust size, Jeremy?
JS: She's perfectly formed, I can assure you. [Laughter]

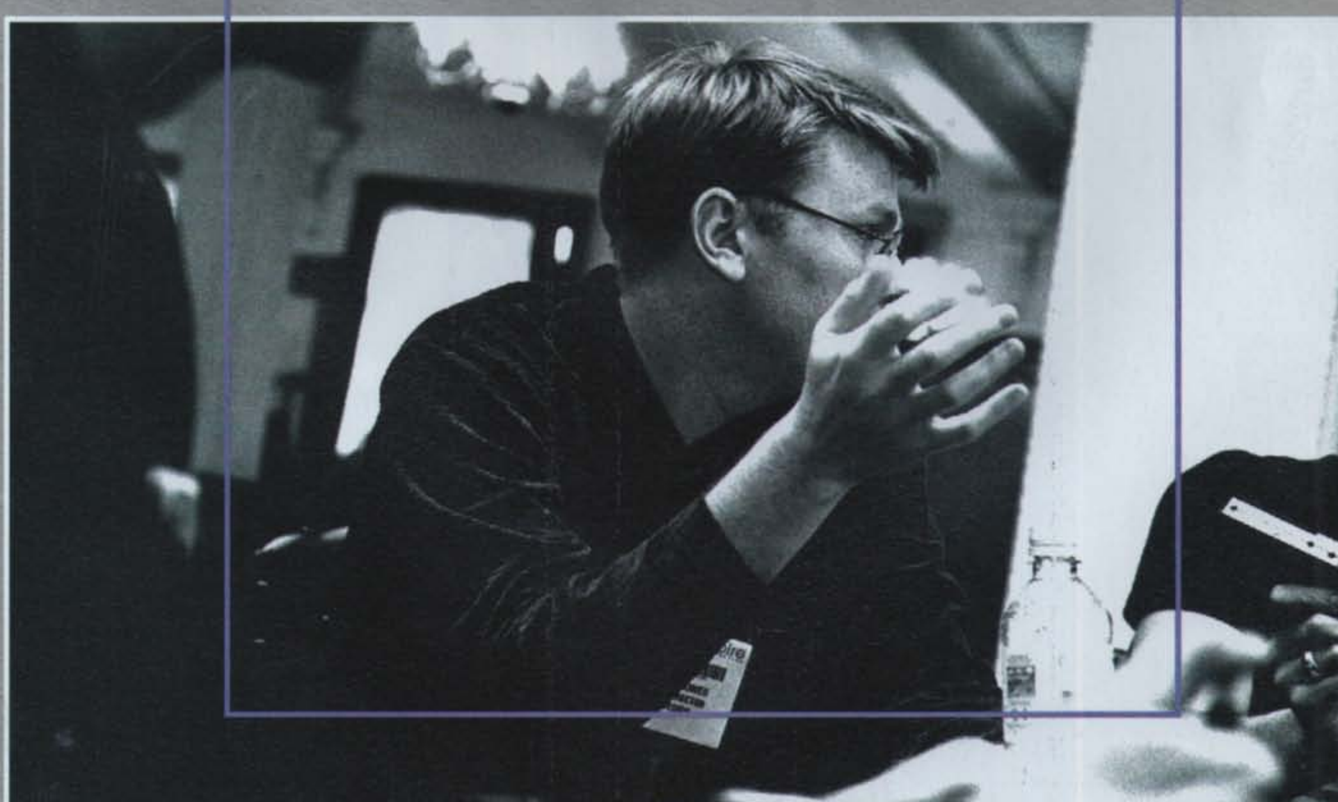
Licences to thrill?

Edge: What about licences? Is it possible to take a character from the outside world and make it a convincing game character? Looking at the people sat here, famous for *Command & Conquer*, *Elite*, *Populous*, *Tomb Raider*, *Lemmings* and *Earthworm Jim*, there's not a licence amongst them, is there?
BS: Well, we've just finished *Blade Runner*, which is a big licence. You get an opportunity to learn a lot more with a pre-designed character and a pre-designed world, and you learn a lot about the subtleties. You learn so much when you have to live with the restrictions of a licence, about character modelling and about design and it's been a really good experience for us. It's helped us develop as artists.
Edge: One of the major differences, it seems, between Japanese and US and European game design, is that we produce a great deal of god games and first-person games, where you don't get to see any one 'character'. The Japanese don't seem to go for that.
DP: Games where you play inside the head of a character that you never see are really bad. It would be really hard to go and sell the lead character from *Doom*, because nobody really knows what he looks like – all you get to see is a hand. In *MDK*, we put the *MDK* character in front of you because we wanted you to see him getting hurt. But that's still not enough for toy companies, because he is still facing away from you. So we had to turn him around now and again to give him some character.
Edge: Does it matter, for the game experience, whether it's a game character you can relate to or not? *Elite* didn't have a character...
DB: With something like *Elite* you're not really creating a character. You're presenting a world to the player and saying, Go and have fun in it. A lot of games work fine like that. I think characters are going to become more important as time goes on. At the moment, the characterisation that we're talking about is on a very shallow level. When we get two-way speech we're going to say, Look at all

this work we have to do to make this character convincing. We're going to need to know what Mario had for breakfast, and whether or not he has a girlfriend.
PM: I agree with that. You've got to be able to converse, but by typing on a keyboard you're never going to be able to converse with a character. I personally think that one of the greatest characters that's been created in recent times is the Tamagotchi egg – that's characterisation for me. That's people actually associating with this little stupid thing. People cared about it, they loved it, they cried when it died. You can't get more relationship than that. One of the reasons it worked, obviously, is that you could fit it in your pocket, but there is still scope for creating characters that people care about. What we mustn't do is try to constantly recreate the characters that Hollywood creates for us. A character can be a whole game, like *Elite*. It didn't have a story, but then I built my own story in my head.
DP: I go to the Game Developer's Conference and 99 people out of a hundred in the room agree that games suck if they're not some kind of interactive story. I'm sitting there going, But I'd rather make up the story – I'd rather someone was following me with the book, writing down everything I did, and that is the story.
DB: With some licences it's really a tragedy that people are presented with a perfectly pre-designed world that they could do a really good job of and they just fall completely flat. For example, *Shadows of the Empire* on the N64. That was disappointing – the graphics were pretty but the game was lacking.

Artificial intelligence

Edge: How long before AI will be strong enough for gamers to really have a hard time telling the difference between, say, an online player and a computer opponent?
DB: The Turing Test is defined as two people typing on a keyboard and for the person on the other end not to realise that it's a computer, but we're not asking just for that. We're asking for inflection and body language and for a face that's going to be convincing enough. Not to believe is a person, but then not to suspend disbelief. If you imagine the sort of dialogues being spoken at the moment by what is basically a robot, the wider audience – the sort of people who routinely watch, I don't know, say soap operas – would not give it the time of day. We're long way from having a love interest in a game, and I don't mean a one-handed relationship.
JS: Well, you really ought to read some of the letters I get...
Edge: Peter, you said last year that AI was the future of gaming. Do you still think that?
PM: I think we've done a wonderful job of creating some beautiful environments, and it's time we started filling them with something other than just the empty space. It's one hell of a big task. It's what we've been talking about here – it is characters. If we try to reflect the real world too accurately we're going to fall foul of our limitations until we can do something with those characters to make them really live. Yes, it's AI, yes it's allowing people the environments to play in. Back in the old days, in an adventure game, you'd go into a room and see all these objects that you wanted to touch, but you couldn't, and we're really still there now. It's aggravating. We've got to start building characters and environments that change with the way that we play. If I'm good at a game, it should re-tune itself to me. One of the really aggravating things about computer games is that we still have 'easy', 'medium' and 'hard' in there. How do people make those choices before they even start the game? We have the technology now, and with more effort we should be ▶



able to balance the game ourselves, on the fly.

DB: At the moment, we're still defining a game mostly by its graphics – ie 2D or 3D – and not by what the player does in the world. I think that the 3Dfx thing is almost a distraction, because it's bringing the graphics back to the fore. We're at the point now where the 3D is fine, and the emphasis will shift to what you are doing within that 3D environment rather than the 3D itself. Is it exciting? How long does it involve you for?

'We're at the point where the 3D is fine, and the emphasis will shift to what you are doing within that 3D environment rather than the 3D itself'
David Braben

PM: We could talk all evening about what we could put in a game to make it more real.

Edge: What kind of things might those things be?

DP: One of the things we're doing in *Messiah* is having characters talk to each other, saying, Hey, have you checked in there? And you'd get the door open, and a guy would come in and look for you – and it would look as if they were searching for you instead of just waiting in a room for you to come in and shoot. Also, I might want to get at this guy hiding behind a pillar, so I could shoot his mate in the kneecap so that he starts screaming and then the guy behind the pillar would try and drag him to safety, at which point, blam!

Edge: Smoke and mirrors. Little tricks that convey reality.

DP: Right. You can make the gamer believe that there's a whole intelligent, complex sequence going on. For the minute, in our world, AI is still fake. It's going to get more convincing, but it's still going to be fake. The days of getting characters to react according to how they feel that day is a long way off.

PM: It's always fake, in every game, and it always has been. AI is what people believe should happen. It's defined by us writing a script and saying, Oh yeah, we'll do this and this, and so on. The real advances that need to be made are in the way that gamers communicate with a game. Until we free ourselves from the limitations of up, down and fire, interaction with the world and the characters will remain fairly basic. Joypads haven't changed one iota since the first console. It's just crazy. Nintendo did something, with that little nipple thing, but we need to go a lot further. A microphone would be cool.

DP: Yeah, a microphone would be a nice start.

DB: A microphone is still useful, even without speech recognition, because at least with multiplayer you can use it.

PM: I'd love all those things. Ah, sod it, let's just go directly neural connected...



Final Fantasy **VII**





Battles are slick, easy to control, and packed to bursting with outrageous effects



Never a company to miss a marketing opportunity, SquareSoft has capitalised on the minor differences between the Japanese and US versions of *FFVII*, and will release *FFVII International* in Japan this month

When the SNES RPG *Final Fantasy III* (see Retroview, page 125) topped the US charts some three years ago, recieving rave reviews from every magazine in the process, the Japanese-styled RPG looked all set for great things in the west. Ultimately that success never really happened, and despite the odd sporadic translation and a hardcore following, it's taken *FFIII*'s successor, now on the PlayStation, to make the gaming world comprehensively aware of RPGs again.

For all its slickness, *Final Fantasy VII* still follows the golden rule of all Japanese console role-playing games: the player works through a pre-ordained storyline which is punctuated with frequent battles fought via a menu system. Many characters and a wealth of cleverly designed subplots and quests which the player can potentially opt to undertake may all help to disguise the game's linear nature, but ultimately, once the final boss has been defeated and the tale is resolved, there is very little to bring anyone but the die-hard fanatic back for another go.

But while most Japanese RPGs have been happy to adopt an if-it's-not-broken-don't-fix-it attitude in bringing their titles across from the 16bit days, *FFVII* has decided to divorce itself almost entirely from its predecessors and tip the whole genre on its head. Taking its cue from a more movie-like perspective, the game seems to delight in pushing almost every boundary of the console RPG forward while still being able to keep the flavour of the original titles intact. Not content with merely jamming its three-CDs' content with a sprawling adventure, the game constantly strives to surprise the player, and ends up succeeding in



Although still turn-based, the battles in *FFVII* can still get as hectic as any out-and-out RPG-styled action game









The incredibly detailed backdrops that impress so much in *FFVII* aren't merely for show – they're also highly interactive. The trainyard includes a puzzle that sees players shunting locos around so that the party can progress





just about every department imaginable.

Leading the way, initially, are a seemingly endless array of astonishingly complex realtime and prerendered graphic sequences. That Square had nearly every Silicon Graphics machine in Japan working flat out to create them is no surprise, with the smallest shop, in the most out-of-the-way village, packed with as much detail as the most important location. Meanwhile, everything is cleverly layered to allow the realtime, Gouraud-shaded characters to move in and around them as if they were proper 3D structures. The FMV that usually heralds the death knell for interactivity is either restricted to brief cut-scenes that load almost instantly and drop in at appropriately dramatic moments, or at times is even combined with both backdrops and characters.

While most non-RPG fans will cite the frequent random-battle encounters and stop-start combat system as common Japanese RPG problems, *FFVII* builds on Square's patented Active Time Battle system and has had the surprise attacks wisely toned down for its western release. While it's possible for beginners to restrict fights to a simple taking-turns structure, at its realtime fastest, with dramatic camera angles sweeping around the graphics, battles can elevate to almost action-game status.

While the storage space that the CD format has afforded *FFVII* has been exploited to the full by Square's graphic designers, just as much attention seems to have been lavished upon expanding the limitations of genre itself. The standard RPG formula (seen in previous *Final Fantasies* and countless other Japanese role-playing games – of battling through maze-like dungeons with a boss encounter and plot development at the end) has been replaced by a much faster, event-filled story that twists and turns from one location to the next. Even the most unassuming character can be crucial to major events that are necessary to the main thrust of the story (an important development for western gamers not familiar with ponderous exploration).

Although *FFVII* has been tweaked somewhat for its western version (including additional monsters and even such niceties as markers indictating entrances and exits from a scene), it's admirable that Square has kept what might be seen as the game's unique 'Japaneseness'. All of the original's 'adult' scenes have been left intact, and even the six-character limit previously inflicted on protagonists' names has been extended to nine, allowing the original Japanese names to be kept. And even if some of the dialogue's Americanisms tend to grate after a while, it does attempt to recompense in making up for the English text's inability to convey as much meaning as the original Japanese.



Although generated using a fairly scant amount of polygons, *FFVII*'s characters behave so realistically that suspending disbelief is an easy task. The game's plot is the crux, however

The 'interactive movie' has long been a dirty term to anyone who values a playable videogame, but *FFVII* succeeds in coming closer than any title yet. The highly complex, melodramatic story and excellently orchestrated chip music really do combine to make players feel real empathy with the characters. This is hardly the easiest of feats and a task usually shied away from by the action/comedy-orientated western graphic adventures. Anyone prepared to commit the admittedly lengthy time it takes to play *Final Fantasy VII* through to its conclusion will be well rewarded by what is most probably the most wholly entertaining title the PlayStation has to yet to offer. The only problem seems to be that even if its success does start a console-RPG avalanche, players will probably have to wait until *Final Fantasy VIII* to experience the genre on this mighty scale again. **E**

Edge rating:

Nine out of ten



FMV interludes slip seamlessly into the action, and are of top quality

Format: **PlayStation**	Publisher: **SquareSoft**	
Developer: **In-house**	Price: **$60 (£45)**	Release: **Out now (US)**

Castlevania Symphony of the Night





Giant menacing skulls (top) and a rotating ensemble of weaponry (above) are but two things to avoid





Konami's designers may have missed opportunities for impressive scrolling but have made up for it with the sheer intensity of some weapon effects (above)





As progress is made the map gradually opens up – once it's been purchased from the shop, that is

As the majority of PlayStation developers venture out into the overcrowded 3D marketplace, the 2D platformer is fast becoming an extremely rare breed; a situation, no doubt, that will be to the chagrin of its most dedicated and loyal followers.

With this in mind Konami's latest PlayStation release will be welcomed by hardcore platform fans the world over, and not simply as a consequence of its retro feel. This series still commands a healthy degree of respect. PlayStation *Castlevania* was released into the Japanese market back in March but made little impact on the UK import scene because of its intrusive Japanese text and speech. It's an unusual game in as much as it goes against the grain of prevailing PlayStation development trends but succeeds regardless.

Staying true to the lineage and perhaps owing more to the four-year-old PC Engine title *Dracula X* (**E**4) than *Castlevania IV*, the game is daunting in both size and scope. In fact, it's far bigger than the 8bit Engine version and positively dwarfs its esteemed 16bit forefather. But it's the non-linear, open-plan game environment and the vast array of characters, weaponry and magic items that makes this an interesting diversion from usual platform fare. In fact, a more accurate reference point would be Nintendo's 16bit classic *Super Metroid* to which this latest saga pays almost religious homage. Witness the gradual opening out of the map, the uncompromising puzzles and, perhaps most significantly, the burning of copious amounts of midnight oil in playing it.

This time the quest sees the player adopting the role of Alucard (the pseudonym Dracula used in Hammer horror flicks when travelling incognito) and avenging not only Dracula himself but Richter, the hero of the series' 1991 flagship SNES title *Castlevania IV*. In some respects this latest trip represents a departure, housing a variety of elements absent from the framework of a traditional platformer. However, players must be prepared to put in the effort to get the most from this. The first hour or so of play reveals a curiously dowdy 16bit-style platformer that is only brightened by some subtle 32bit graphical accomplishments. The game's later stages, however, reveal some surprisingly deep RPG-based play mechanics that reward enough to keep the player sufficiently interested. Weapons and spells become more devastating (there are even hidden special moves), environments become more impressive, and, above all, there's a greater feeling of atmosphere than in previous episodes.

However, on a purely aesthetic level, there are some odd disparities in quality. For some reason (probably



This clock, situated in a central part of the castle not far from Dracula, has a significance that gradually becomes evident as the game progresses





related with the game's hiatus-ridden development cycle), some of the visuals are surprisingly crude – looking for all the world as though they were originally destined for the Mega Drive or SNES but halfway through production ended up being saved for 32bit. Some sprites shuffle along unconvincingly with just a couple of animation frames, backdrops occasionally suffer from dreadful shading, and some of the character design is simply laughable – the breakdancing lizards and Ninja Turtle lookalikes look like the unfortunate by-products of Konami's lesser-skilled artists.

In some areas, though, it's clear that the team's designers have made a conscious effort to embrace 32bit hardware. While scrolling backdrops are conspicuously flat and largely devoid of 3D effects they do employ subtle, multi-layered parallax and shadowing effects, with occasional Mode 7-style zooming. Though PlayStation *Castlevania* will draw few onlookers, what innovations do exist are unlikely to go unnoticed by the player.

The music, too, is perplexingly varied: quite why Konami's team chose to implement jerking segues from impressive, haunting classical compositions into cheesy lift muzak and screeching rawk is anybody's guess.

Those looking for a quick fix or more immediate, arcade-style thrills are unlikely to grasp *Castlevania*'s intricacies. On the surface it looks archaic, but tucked just beneath is a game that throws the majority of PlayStation eye candy into sharp relief. Hardcore gamers will relish its classical sensibilities. E

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten



One of the game's more interesting innovations: an RPG-style inventory offering weapons and magic items









Some bosses are worth the wait (top, left), although they don't dazzle until later in the game. The castle itself is depicted in cut-away form with the exterior walls visible against the sky backdrop (above centre)



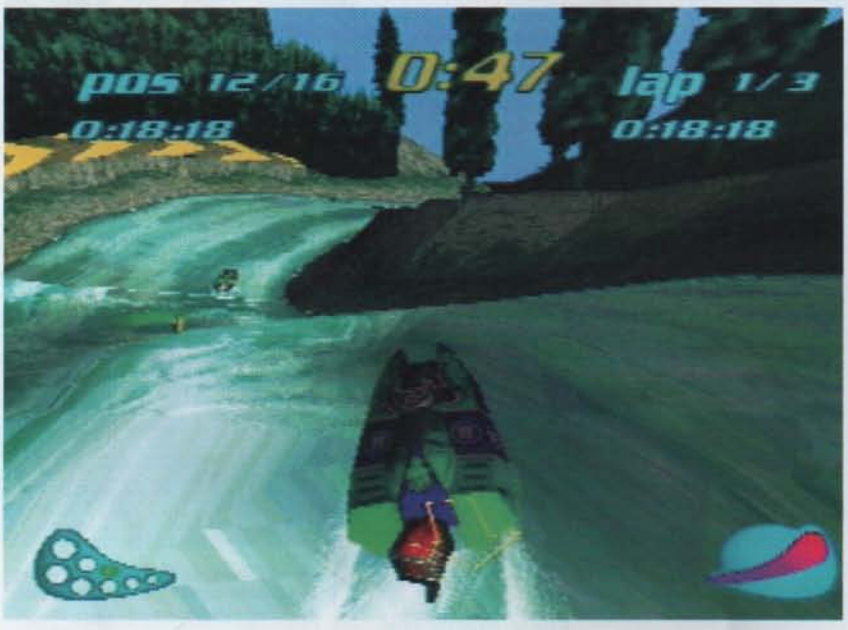
Format: **PlayStation**	Publisher: **Konami**	
Developer: **KCET**	Price: **£45**	Release: **Out now**

Rapid Racer













Rapid Racer **sees players testing their boat-control skills in a variety of environments. Sadly, very few of the sections offer any form of gripping excitement**





The game's horizontal or vertical twoplayer split-screen mode halves the frame rate but still flies along

With the car racing genre rapidly approaching gridlock, developers are looking at other forms of transport that can be pitted against each other in some form of competitive scenario. And one area that has been relatively left untouched in the videogaming world is that of boat racing.

The reason developers have shied away from watersports in the past can be probably be put down to the difficulty in creating a suitably realistic look and feel for the racing medium. True, *WaveRace 64* managed this with astounding aplomb, fooling players who'd never jetskied into believing they were doing so on the screen, but such videogaming moments are regrettably rare.

Nevertheless, *Rapid Racer* thrusts players into the world of powerboat racing as they fight for control of their craft around the calm waters of exclusive harbours, unforgiving narrow canyon passes, rough cascading rapids and suchlike.

Six tracks are offered, but these can also be raced at night, and are reversed later in the game, resulting in 18 combinations. Initially, only the first three are available, requiring players to finish ahead of the CPU competitors in all each before access to the next course is granted.

The usual one or twoplayer time trial, single race and championship modes are offered after choosing a boat from a selection offering varying acceleration, top speed, and handling abilities. During the actual race, objects such as turbos and time stops can be collected, which greatly help the player's progression. Also, acquiring five yellow icons dotted around the courses will open up a bonus level where a particular characteristic of the boat, such as its top speed, can be maxed out.

Once all 18 circuits are beaten, the game's Fractal mode becomes available, presenting 256,000 randomly generated courses. (Whether or not players will still be interested by that point is debatable, though.)

Initial impressions of *Rapid Racer* are good. Never before has the PlayStation played host to a game handling



Given the speed of the game, the hi-res display and the amount of polygons being thrown around, the game draws impressively far into the distance





Different views are available, although the in-boat camera (top right) is likely to make players feel ill



so many fully textured polygons in the machine's hi-res mode at 50 frames per second (60fps in NTSC). The sheer fluidity of motion alone is bound to impress even the most cynical player.

However, *Rapid Racer's* gameplay is unlikely to have the same effect. The most apparent problem is handling. While some of the boat responses appear accurate, for the majority of the time players will curse the unrealistic reactions and awkward controls. Jumps, a frequent feature on later courses, have a tendency to frustrate rather than excite, as the boat usually ends up facing the wrong way after rolling around, wasting precious seconds. This is despite the fact that on the previous lap the exact same jump could be performed without any such time-wasting diversions.

In some of the more undulating courses water boasts an unusual gravity-defying ability to flow up hills and line the sides of banked corners, but this is hardly the game's most surreal aspect. The award for this is a tie between the boats' ability to travel sideways in massive car-like powerslides and the developer's apparent need to include a lava track for the final stage.

But the game's ultimate problem is that, other than the powerboat setting, there is nothing here that is new – there are no alarms, no surprises and little excitement.

ONCE ALL 18 CIRCUITS ARE BEATEN, THE FRACTAL MODE **ENABLES PLAYERS TO RACE ON 256,000 RANDOMLY GENERATED COURSES,** BUT WHETHER ANYONE WILL BE **INTERESTED BY THEN IS DEBATABLE**

Beneath the polygonal gloss lies a run-of-the-mill racing game whose gameplay requires significant tuning.

As a technological showcase, *Rapid Racer* is a truly impressive achievement. As a game in its own right, however, it falls disappointingly short of the expectations aroused by its glorious visuals.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten




The first course, with its flat, calm waters (left), offers little in terms of difficulty, although controlling the craft can still be a handful. Some of the later courses incorporate jumps and white water-like rapids (right) for players to deal with, although the boat's response in these waters may prove more frustrating than realistic




By collecting five yellow icons during a course, players can undertake a bonus level to upgrade their boat

Format: **PlayStation**	Publisher: **SCEE**	
Developer: **In-house**	Price: **£35**	Release: **October**

Hexen II





Simulated metallics, outlandish weapons and airborne monsters are some of the unique touches that give *Hexen II* its very own first-person appeal

Raven, which usefully employed the *Doom* engine for its swords 'n' sorcery outings, *Heretic* and *Hexen*, has retained its intimacy with id and returned with the first full game to utilise the already ageing but spectacularly flexible *Quake* engine. Over the next few months it will be joined by a rash of *Quake*-engined competition (*Half-Life*, *SiN*, *Daikatana*) all boasting, as *Hexen II* does, a host of technical and creative refinements to id's instant classic. But *Hexen II* is right here, right now, which, as the marketing frag-fest of Christmas approaches, is a serious advantage.

Those familiar with *Hexen* will instantly recognise two Raven hallmarks (innovations, even). The first is that the game organises itself along traditional pencil-and-paper RPG lines. There is a choice of four characters to choose from, each offering different skill sets, weapons and strengths. The Assassin, for example, has the advantage of stealth (she can lurk unnoticed in shadows) but suffers the deficit of physical vulnerability. Each character can accumulate up to four weapons (both close-quarter and projectile depending on the character) which are powered by collectable manna and can be given prodigious strength for brief periods using an appropriate artefact. These artefacts are scattered all about, some obviously, some secreted. Taking the form of rings, amulets, spells and the like, they confer a wide range of effects. Some act as weapons (the disc of Repulsion, for example, bounces enemy fire back whence it came), some as protection, others as enhancements (fly, run faster). In addition to this, a character's progress is rewarded by ever-increasing general abilities in speed, armour capability and deadliness.

To the hardcore *Quaker* this may all seem a little fussy and, in truth, it does take a short while to get used to. But once mastered, the sheer diversity of weapons and spells, all easily accessed through a keystroke or two, offers a continually interesting array of attacks and strategies. Moreover, the meat and potatoes of the action is still good old-fashioned run and gun – albeit with some fancy bells and whistles.

The second major divergence from the 3D action template is that *Hexen II* is not chopped up into a sequence of contained levels. Rather, the game is designed around four huge hubs, each containing a



The fantasy theme of the game, coupled with the multiple character classes, gives *Hexen II* an RPG feel





Spells, which must be collected, are all accompanied by the requisite 3Dfx special effect. Playing *Hexen II* without a dedicated accelerator card is not recommended, but for those that have it, it's a great showcase



Like its predecessor, *Hexen II* distinguishes itself from the current crop of first-person games with colour-rich levels



***Quake* stalwarts may not find the rather frilly weapons entirely to their liking, but the varied monsters and the hub-centred maps make for a far superior oneplayer experience**

multitude of subsections. To finish a hub requires the player not merely to clear the area of hostiles and push a few buttons, but to forage about and unearth various objects which must be used and combined in whatever way is dictated by the unfolding story (gleaned from scrolls and messages, etc). Which means, in effect, that the player is required to visit and revisit areas many times over to progress. This could be a chore, but Raven has excelled in creating a world sufficiently inventive and interactive to sustain the interest.

Consequently, playing *Hexen II* makes for a riveting blend of action and puzzling. Here, a barrel needs to be moved to climb a broken staircase; there, some sand must be found to forge glass in order to make a lens to defeat a crystal Golem. Smashing stained glass windows, hacking down seemingly impregnable walls, catapulting yourself over a battlement; all are integral to the action. Moreover, Raven has gone to great lengths to build credible and often very beautiful environments. Ranging from medieval, to Egyptian, to Greco-Roman, to Meso-American, every level is packed with convincing detail and architectural panache. Indeed, such is the variety of textures, players will sometimes see a particularly ornate rug or mosaic only once. The range of enemies is equally impressive, including flying imps, were-jaguars, and death-dealing squid, all featuring twice the level of animation of *Quake*'s menagerie, and substantially better artificial intelligence. One Archer, for instance, has the temerity to duck when fired upon.

Technically, *Hexen II* represents a genuine evolution in the *Quake* engine, with translucency, moving and moveable objects, dynamic polygons, all available in software. However, it bears repeating again that in GL mode, supporting various 3D accelerators (and especially 3Dfx and PowerVR), the game is vastly superior. Faster, smoother and with filtering and anti-aliasing, *Hexen II* is considerably more impressive than any PC equivalent.

Overall, Raven's game is an excellent addition to the increasingly ubiquitous first-person genre. What it lacks in visceral shocks it more than adequately compensates for in brooding menace and carefully generated suspense (an atmosphere noticeably accentuated by excellent music). Where it sometimes appears to lose momentum and immediate purpose it continues to beguile with the ingenuity and imagination of the puzzles, and the lavishness of the design. True, weapons could be more plentiful, and periodically the seriousness of it all is a little oppressive, but for its ambition and level of all-round technical accomplishment, *Hexen II* is essential stuff for high-end-PC owners.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

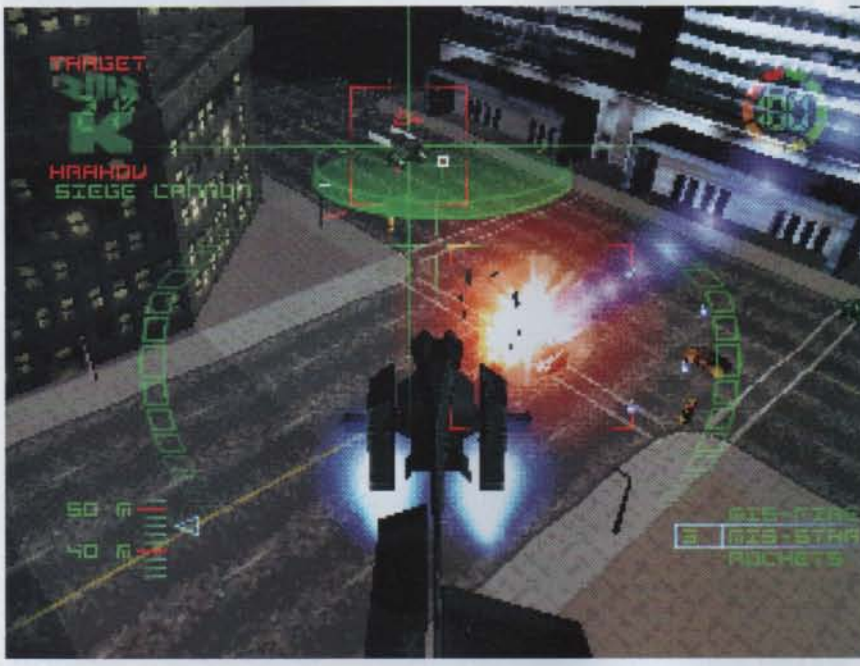


Developer Raven has used realtime dynamic light-sourcing to give *Hexen II* its atmosphere



Format: **PC**	Publisher: **Activision**	
Developer: **Raven**	Price: **£40**	Release: **Out now**

G-**Police**







An array of different view options allow players to step outside the cockpit to dramatic visual effect. However, playing the game from all but the in-Havoc views is prohibitively problematic





The friendly wingmen in the game allow players to double firepower when dealing with stronger foes

Having already given the PlayStation some of its finest titles, Psygnosis is striking out again this Christmas with a clutch of games aimed at reaffirming its position as the UK's premier PlayStation development force.

Leading the pack is *G-Police*, an ambitious hybrid of strategy game and 3D shoot 'em up which Psygnosis boss Ian Hetherington brashly backed as being the Christmas number-one PlayStation title upon an early sighting of a unfinished build back in May. A brave prediction which, if it wasn't for such strong competition from the likes of *Tomb Raider 2*, could have become a reality.

The year is 2097 and the player is a G-Policeman, a future cop who patrols the gaming environment in a Havoc craft – essentially a helicopter minus rotorblades.

The task at hand is to negotiate 38 separate domed mini-cities that form the off-world colony on Jupiter's moon Callisto on the look out for futuristic ne'er-do-wells.

It's a mission-based game in the *Syndicate* mould, with briefings directing players to guard the president's limo from attack; to take out rampaging, malfunctioning mining droids; and to follow a suspected felon to his secret arms cache, among 32 surprisingly varied others. *G-Police* scores highly in terms of design, then, and it's refreshing to play a game where work obviously continued long after the 3D engine was in place.

The game has three main points of interest. First, there's the unusual environment the game presents. The domed cities are huge and each mission often involves a number of them being held in memory simultaneously, thus allowing the negotiation of great distances with complete freedom, passing from dome to dome through interconnecting tunnels. It's quite an achievement given the detail of the buildings, the numerous innocent vehicles scooting about, and the AI processor load required to keep it going about its business convincingly.

The second chief point is the flight model. The player's ship bobs and sways convincingly and, once mastered, can be swept and weaved through the 'Blade Runner'-styled streets. Analogue pad support makes the game even more playable and increases the already impressive feeling of flight.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, there are those mission designs. Great variety and imagination is exhibited throughout the 35 missions (excluding secrets) and the game never ceases to impress and entertain throughout its duration. Marvellous SGI cut-scenes further the space-age plot occasionally, and push the game onto two discs' worth of code.

The one fly in the ointment is that the game appears to have stretched the PlayStation's resources a little too far, using relatively short depth cueing in order to keep things moving at a pace. An option to trade off frame rate against view distance is provided, but compromising this can make the frequent inner-city aerial dogfights become jerky and confusing affairs.

The 3Dfx-accelerated PC version may deliver the game in exactly the form its ambitious creators intended. **Edge** certainly hopes so.

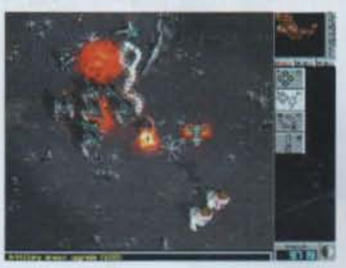
Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **PlayStation**	Publisher: **Psygnosis**	
Developer: **Wheelhaus**	Price: **£45**	Release: **October 24**

Dark Reign





Crushing the enemy's bases beneath a booted foot is a lot of fun, but *Dark Reign*'s impressive AI makes it a harder job than in many other realtime games



Combatants can choose from a wide variety of buildings, many of which can be upgraded

After the phenomenal success of Westwood's *Command & Conquer* there was little doubt that the realtime strategy game was here to stay. The equally huge success of the sequel, *Red Alert*, and the flood of realtime strategy games from other companies, have only gone to prove the point.

Red Alert was something of a disappointment in terms of technical innovation and gameplay improvements, though. Despite the massive potential offered by the realtime genre, the fairly basic game mechanics remained largely unchanged from *C&C*, as did the AI, and even the units were largely recognisable as minor variations on those of its predecessor. Until now, only *Warcraft II* has made any significant alterations to the template, offering three separate resources, unit line of sight, a more complex building and upgrade tree, and greater distinctions between ground, air, and naval units.

What makes *Dark Reign* stand out from its rivals, then, is that it's the first realtime game to offer any big gameplay differences to *C&C*. The fundamentals remain largely the same – from a top-down, near-isometric view the player takes control of one side in a futuristic war. Collecting resources, constructing bases, manufacturing units and sending them off to destroy the enemy are all accomplished via a simple point-and-click interface. Lurking beneath this familiar exterior, however, are a host of advances to the game system.

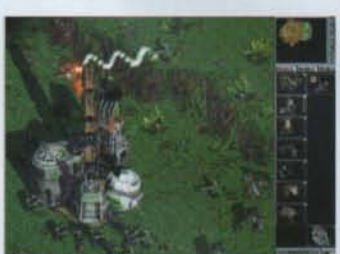
Perhaps the most obvious is the terrain system. In *Dark Reign*, the landscape works as more than merely a simple backdrop for the action, and instead has a direct effect on the game. At the simplest level, the different types of terrain affect each units' movement rate, depending on whether it uses wheels, tracks, legs, or anti-grav for locomotion. More interesting, and much more significant, is the addition of elevation. *Dark Reign's* terrain is three dimensional, with different angles of slope being used to create hills, valleys, cliffs, and so on. Not only does the slope affect movement – walking units can climb any slope, albeit at reduced speed, while hover vehicles can only deal with flat terrain – but it also affects line of sight and thus combat. Units can't see over hills, but a unit on top of a ridge can see further, while those hiding behind it can't be shot at. This alone makes for a far more interesting and more challenging game.

Added to that is an advanced AI system for the player's troops. By opening a small menu it's possible to set various parameters for each unit or group – how much damage they'll take before retreating, how they react to enemies they come across and how far they'll pursue them. In combination with three preset orders – scout, harass, and seek & destroy – and an advanced waypoints system, this vastly expands the options on offer.

A whole range of clever new unit abilities (snipers that can camouflage themselves as rocks or trees, for example) and several other innovations go together to make this the first major step forward for the realtime strategy genre since it began with *Dune 2*. *Dark Reign* takes realtime strategy wargames just that little bit further, and is a very fine game in its own right.

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten





The presentation is slick and professional throughout the game, building a convincing atmosphere





As in all realtime strategy games, large scraps between large groups of units are very common

Format: **PC**	Publisher: **Activision**	
Developer: **Auran**	Price: **£40**	Release: **Out now**

Shadow Warrior







The innovative selection of cartoon-style weaponry includes a beating heart and a Medusa's head



Characters look effective from a distance, but appear blocky and crude when viewed up close, unfortunately



With the imminent arrival of the heavily tipped *Quake II*, *Hexen II*, *Unreal*, *Half Life* and *SiN*, the first-person shoot 'em up's domination of the PC games market is in no danger of abating. Each of these is using either a souped-up version of the existing *Quake* engine or a brand-new affair designed to take advantage of 3D accelerators, factors which make it seem odd that Eidos should choose to release *Shadow Warrior* – a sprite-based martial arts shooter which looks inferior to just about every other leading-edge 3D game out there.

Players are immediately placed in familiar territory: collect weapons, shoot or blow up enemies of varying strengths, and solve elementary puzzles based on flicking a switch on one side of a level to open a door on the other side. Unlike *Quake*, movement is restrictive and confusing due to a formidably large selection of keys for everything from ducking and crouching to activating special weapons and regaining health. Even looking up and down requires separate keystrokes, making it desperately difficult to kill enemies at other levels.

As in *Duke Nukem 3D*, interaction with scenery plays a large part in the game – blasting windows, plants, or barrels often reveals secrets and power-ups. However, it's the general atmosphere that saves *Shadow Warrior* from premature consignment to the bargain bin, with plenty of Oriental wisecracks, an innovative selection of weapons (although the moral majority have enforced the removal of shurikens from the player's arsenal, now replaced with darts), and a decent clutch of detailed enemies. Another feature of note is the presence of gun emplacements which, when captured, enable players to spray bullets at hordes of enemies, who always appear to be handily located right in the firing line.

Arriving more than a year after *Quake* wowed the world with its polygons, *Shadow Warrior* does look decidedly primitive. It plays smoothly enough and the levels demonstrate some clever design aspects including the use of independently moving objects such as boats, but the graphics can appear horrendously limp at times, the sprites in particular suffering from awful pixellation when viewed up close.

Duke Nukem 3D gained a cult following because the opposition at the time (*Quake*) suffered in singleplayer mode. *Shadow Warrior* offers a similarly engaging game for the single player, but coming so late, and using such aged technology, it's never going to be anything more than an also-ran.



Shadow Warrior* represents the final outing for the Build engine, used previously in *Duke Nukem 3D

Edge rating:

Six out of ten

Format: **PC**	Publisher: **Eidos**	
Developer: **3D Realms**	Price: **£40**	Release: **October**





Were first-person games judged merely on explosions alone, *Shadow Warrior* could be a contender

Nuclear Strike







A quick glance at Electronic Arts' portfolio reveals a not-inconsiderable number of sequels and yearly updates. As the latest instalment of the apparently interminable *Strike* series, *Nuclear Strike* is one such title.

This time players chase after LeMonde, a former member of the French Foreign Legion who was posted to Indo-China and subsequently thrown out for violence against civilians. Working as a mercenary ever since (whose services are regularly bought by the world's top secret agencies), he has recently got his hands on several nuclear devices and possesses the obligatory level of insanity required to use them.

As the operative assigned to stop him, players face five campaigns, each containing around eight missions, making use of the four types of vehicles on offer. These include several helicopters, a harrier jet, a tank, armoured boats and a hovercraft.

Like previous *Strike* titles, *Nuclear*'s missions are fairly varied and strategy is fundamental in conquering them. A limited number of armour, fuel and ammunition supplies exist, and utilising these requires a military-like tactical approach so that successful completion of the level is possible. Marching straight into an enemy's base without first taking care of the alarm detection systems, for example, is an elementary mistake and one that will certainly prove costly.

Nuclear Strike is an FMV-packed affair with MTV-style presentation, and, although the choice of some of the material (such as scenes of collapsed buildings following an earthquake) which accompanies the Hollywood-influenced narrative is questionable, the quality of the footage is impressive, and it builds the atmosphere for the game proper in stylish fashion.



Players have to attack several enemy installations, some of which are particularly impressively styled

The same can hardly be said of in-game visuals, though. The background textures certainly merit a mention as some of the best yet on the PlayStation, but, a few new satisfying explosion animations apart, there is nothing here that hasn't been achieved before, and as such this title doesn't represent a massive graphical step forward from its predecessor, *Soviet Strike*.

Fans of the series lusting after more above-viewed shooting action will naturally welcome this latest regurgitation. The seasoned gamer, however, will no doubt walk away with a feeling of déjà vu. E

Edge rating:

Six out of ten



As with previous titles in the series, *Nuclear Strike*'s locations and background details, such as vegetation and villages, are appropriate for the game's setting. This attention to detail extends to some of the enemy's more traditional – but no less dangerous – attack vessels (top, centre)







All of the many different vehicles offer certain advantages, and some, such as the hovercraft in the first level (above, right), can be selected at will

Format: **PlayStation**	Publisher: **Electronic Arts**	
Developer: **In-house**	Price: **£45**	Release: **Out now**

Rockman X4



Powering up the standard weapon for a few seconds releases a high energy blast with devastating effects



Most of the game's inspiration has come from previous titles in the series, while what *is* new is hardly ground-breaking stuff, and unlikely to impress all but the most hardcore fan

With the majority of developers having moved on to polygon-packed games, it would be easy for some speculators to consider the 2D genre dead. This is hardly the case – and if proof is needed that there's plenty of life still left in this survivor from the '80s, then Treasure's recent N64 outing *Yuke Yuke Trouble Makers* (**E**48) has it in spades.

So for this *Rockman* sequel at least, the action remains anchored to a side-viewed perspective. Players can tackle this 2D assault course as Rockman X or as his chum Zero. After finishing the first level, the choice is left to the player as to which of the game's other eight stages to approach first.

Each level is set in a new and contrasting environment, but all of them conform to the same basic structure: two areas followed by a boss encounter. Every time a boss is beaten, the player is rewarded with a short anime sequence and Rockman X acquires a new weapon, up to a maximum of ten.

Most of the game ploughs through familiar *Rockman X* territory, although some aspects have been improved. Visually, Rockman's previous 32bit outing did little to test the PlayStation's abilities; this latest chapter in the saga offers occasional moments of graphical extravagance, with sumptuous backgrounds and colourful, solidly designed enemies. There are also several gameplay detours – such as collapsing floors and the ability to use a mobile suit and a hover bike – to tease gamers' prowess and provide some variety.

However, even these diversions show insufficient ingenuity to convince seasoned gamers that this series has evolved since its first appearance. And as such, it isn't the best argument for 2D **Edge** has seen recently.

It will be interesting to monitor the success of the forthcoming *Megaman Neo*, which uses a full-on 3D environment – it will surely be an appropriate litmus test in the 2D-versus-3D debate.

Edge rating:

Six out of ten









Each of *Rockman X4*'s levels differs substantially from the others, holding a few surprises in store (far left), and some impressive bosses (far right)

Format: **PlayStation**	Publisher: **Capcom**	
Developer: **In-house**	Price: **¥5,800 (£35)**	Release: **Out now (Japan)**

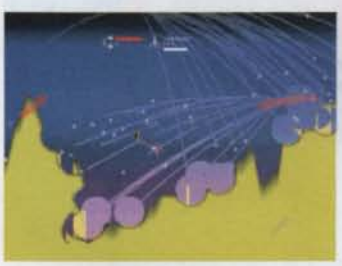
Duke Nukem







Lobotomy's lighting effects (above, top right) are exaggerated but heighten the atmosphere superbly



***Death Tank* is provided gratis with *Duke Nukem*, but owners will need an *Exhumed* or *Quake* save to play**

Sega's relationship with Seattle-based codeshop Lobotomy is a gold star on a Saturn report card invariably marked with red crosses. With the woefully undersold *Exhumed* a testament to its creative abilities, this conversion of PC favourite *Duke Nukem* underlines Lobotomy's credentials as a developer with genuine talent. It is, in short, an inspired conversion.

For those unfamiliar with the PC original, one of *Duke Nukem*'s most impressive features is that its environments aren't entirely divorced from its gameplay. Naturally, it offers the traditional quota of secret areas and hidden ammunition, but for sheer attention to detail it still has few peers. Exchanging shots with aliens in the bar on the second level, for example, results in smashed bottles and bullet holes spattering the walls. While hardly earth-shatteringly innovative, it's touches such as these, among many others, that make *Nukem* such a pleasure.

It's also significant that *Nukem*'s many varied locations have a considerable bearing on gunfights. Because many aliens require more than one hit to dispatch, it's essential for players to make use of cover. This, as an experience, is almost akin to a multiplayer 'deathmatch' – a far cry from the monotony of a solitary *Quake* game. Weaponry, too, strengthens *Nukem*'s status as a game for the solo player. With remote-detonated 'pipe' bombs, tripwire-activated explosives and cannons that both shrink and freeze aliens, it's possible to be remarkably creative in the midst of a melee.

Despite *Nukem*'s linear, level-based progression, there's a surprising level of continuity. At the end of level two Duke is captured by his extra-terrestrial foes. Level three begins with Duke, sans weaponry, frying in an electric chair; players must leap out and locate the weapon concealed in a secret area before the slaughter can continue. Story-based moments are simple touches – and easy to implement – but, as far as this genre is concerned, *Nukem* is to be praised for doing so.

Lobotomy's conversion is almost pixel-perfect in many areas – slight details may have been overlooked, but their absence will not be missed. Indeed, the only real criticism that could be levelled at it as a conversion is that the network play of the original is unavailable to UK buyers. However, with Sega unwilling to introduce a link cable or its Netlink peripheral to these shores, this omission is lamentable but inevitable.

As the software industry continues to mature, so does the content of a select few releases. This, with time, is increasing as developers begin to broaden their creative horizons. Saturn *Duke Nukem* (like its PC cousin) is exceedingly violent and often puerile. But, most importantly, it's an accomplished shoot 'em up. And for that alone, it's a near-essential purchase.







Though an accurate port, Lobotomy has thankfully elected not to convert the PC original's parallaxing...

Edge rating:

Eight out of ten

Format: **Saturn**	Publisher: **Sega**	
Developer: **Lobotomy**	Price: **£45**	Release: **Out now**

Once more the arcade scene throws up a diverse selection of titles, including the odd and the familiar

Final Furlong



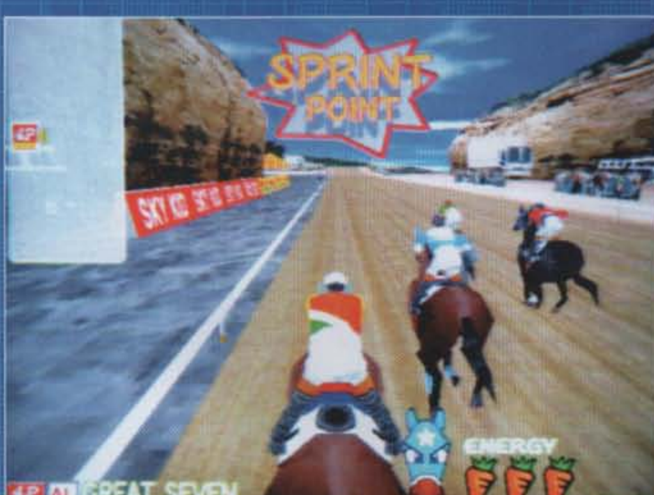
Despite the subject matter, a multiplayer race proves as exciting as any other coin-op







In order to maintain the perfect pace throughout the race, messages are displayed on-screen, instructing players on how to proceed (left) or warning them of possible over-exhaustion if they're running the horse ragged (top left)





The game's 'whip' button is best saved for a track's final energy-depleting last stretch

Although western gamers have thankfully been spared of such torment, in Japan horse racing games are big business, with hundreds of titles available on every imaginable format. These interpretations of the nag-based sport very often feature simulation aspects, allowing players to raise and breed horses, with real horse and race results data included in the package, too.

Having realised this style of presentation would not make the ideal transition to the action-packed arcade market, race master Namco has wisely dropped the potentially tedious management options in favour of a pure, out-and-out racing game.

Final Furlong's cabinet requires players to sit astride a scaled-down model of a horse and rock back and forth in order to cajole its on-screen equivalent into a gallop. Pulling on either side of its reigns-like handle will make the horse turn left or right, while pressing one of the two buttons available enables players to utilise the whip, ideal for getting the most out of the animal when nearing the finish line. However, as in real life, over-eager flagellation results in an exhausted steed, so its timing becomes a crucial aspect of the gameplay, particularly as far as the finishing sections of each race are concerned.

The usual on-screen statistics, such as race position, are available, but rather than display its current velocity, the horse's stamina appears, represented as a group of carrots (of which there are a maximum of five) which reduce in number as the race progresses. Players must therefore maintain a fine balance between the horse's speed and its stamina.

Throughout the race, several messages appear, informing players if the horse is running at the optimum speed, or sounding the alarm if it's going too fast and running the risk of exhaustion.

Final Furlong features three courses of differing lengths and several horses to choose from, as well as allowing four players to take part in a linked-cabinet race.

The experience is certainly energetic one, and surprisingly exciting for a game based on such a tedious sport. Whether or not such a distinctive game will make it to to these shores is another matter, though. E

Developer	Namco
Release	Out now (Jap)
Origin	Japan







Several horses are offered, and the three available courses differ in technical difficulty

Pocket Fighters







Pocket Fighters' cartoon-like approach should find itself a gap in the beat 'em up market and will no doubt be well received in Japanese arcades. It deserves to do equally well if it's released in the western hemisphere



The game boasts a healthy amount of colourful and nicely animated visuals

Pocket Fighters features ten super-deformed characters from Capcom's popular beat 'em ups. As a result, the game doesn't take itself too seriously, and this is reflected in the simplicity of the controls, which consist of only three buttons – kick, punch, and special.

One original feature is the 'Costume Play' option, reflecting a trend among otakus to wear the outfit of their favourite videogame character: players can change a character's costume, and the range of combos possible will be determined by the clothes being worn.

With plenty of comical touches, *Pocket Fighters* should be considered a light-hearted yet original addition to a stifled arcade genre rather than a true sequel to Capcom's distinguished heritage.







Unsurprisingly, the moves are based on those of the previous *Street Fighter* hits

Developer	Capcom
Release	TBA (UK)
Origin	Japan

Street Fighter III: Second Impact





Expect the usual variety of multiple hit combos

Developer	Capcom
Release	TBA
Origin	Japan

Given the company's record, Capcom's announcement of a *Street Fighter III* sequel is unlikely to dislodge the world from its orbit. After all, such sequels roll around with the grinding inevitability of an 'Only Fools And Horses' Christmas special.

In this latest version, subtitled *Giant Attack*, two new characters join the fighting ranks – Hugo the giant and a rebel named Yurian – and their moves rely essentially on brutal strength rather than speed or dexterity.

The other characters all possess a range of new moves, and the Super Arts attacks now incorporate those found in *Street Fighter EX*.

Also, pressing the heavy punch and kick buttons simultaneously initiates a vicious personal attack, and these are specific to each of the fighters.

This is the ninth iteration of the *Street Fighter* series, yet their attraction remains seemingly undiminished in Capcom's 2D beat 'em up-bonkers home market.



While the visuals in this *Street Fighter III* sequel are improved, with more detailed fighters and backgrounds, gameplay remains mainly unchanged

Gallery

In celebration of the quality of SquareSoft's latest game (see page 84), this month's Gallery is something of a showcase for the artwork of the glorious *Final Fantasy VII*. Rarely has **Edge** seen CGI of this quality...



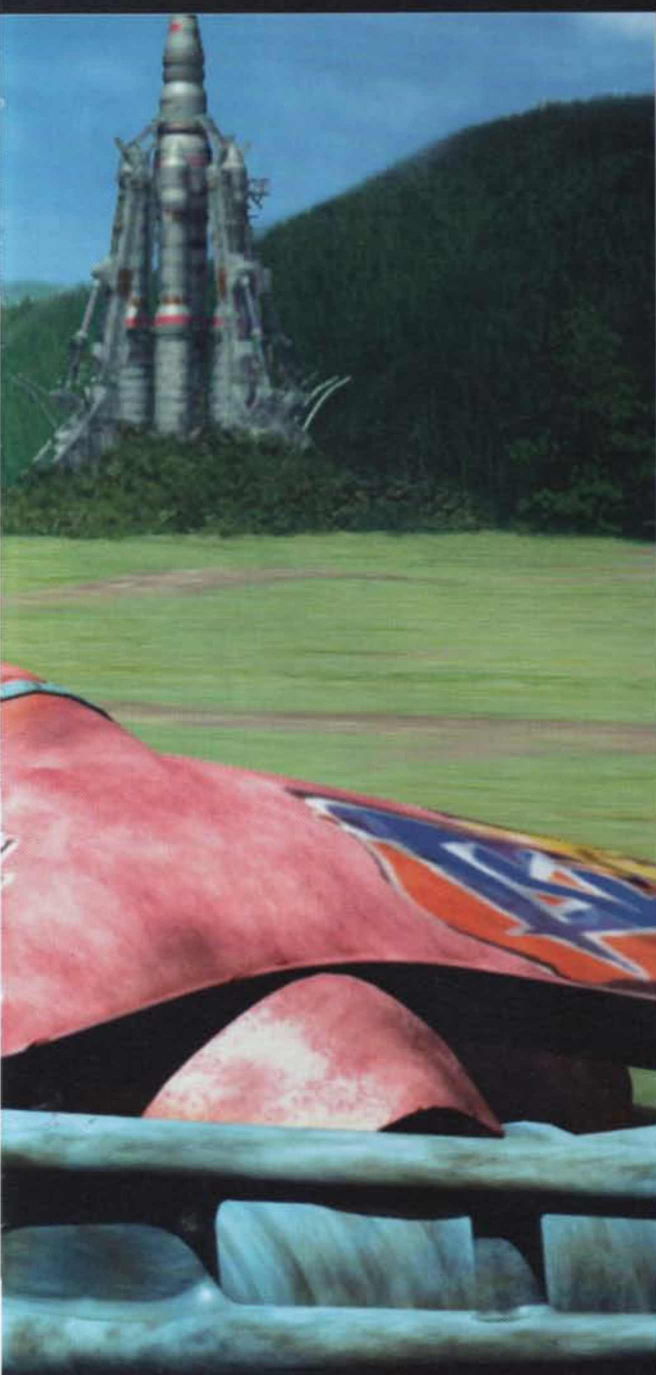




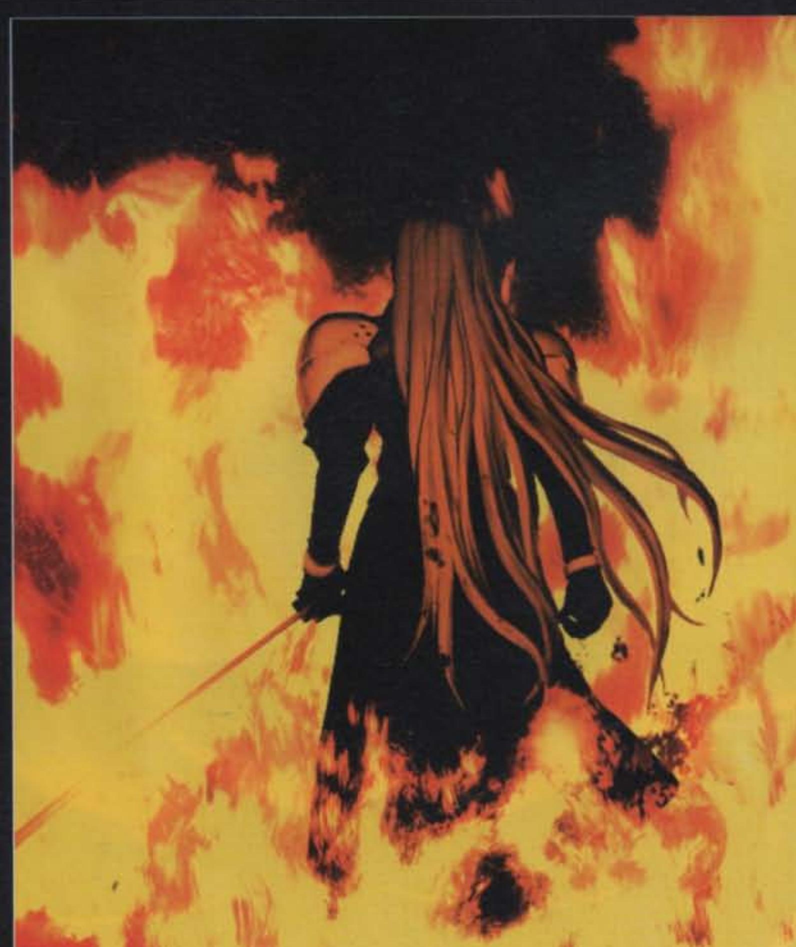
The rendered artwork created by SquareSoft to accompany *Final Fantasy VII* is a marked departure to the usual fine-art style of regular *FF* illustrator Yoshitaka Amano. What makes it even more impressive is that for many of Square's in-house graphic designers this was their first project using the company's (then) newly acquired Silicon Graphics workstations.

The imagination that has gone into creating some of the modes of transport in the game is amply evident here.

Images rendered with Alias software on Silicon Graphics hardware by artists of Square Co. Ltd, Japan








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EVENT







In stark contrast to the static look of much 3D game CGI, Square's designers were able to bring a much-needed touch of flair and composition to *Final Fantasy VII's* promotional artwork.

By having a history in traditional graphics the artists were able to use SGI workstations as merely a new type of media. The game's director Hironobu Sakaguchi has commented that he was amazed that many of the company's artists were able to reach such a professional degree of work after just three months using Alias software.

Images rendered with Alias software on Silicon Graphics hardware by artists of Square Co. Ltd, Japan









Baroque is a first-person sci-fi horror game that takes place in a darkly atmospheric environment that takes many of its visual cues from the Renaissance period, hence the title. These unusual designs originated in Japan; the artists used traditional illustration techniques for the masters, and then send them to the States where they're turned into CGI.

Images rendered using Softimage by Tony Kim of Energia, Hollywood, USA



These stunningly detailed, dystopian cityscapes were created by Japanese codeshop Riverhillsoft for *Overblood 2*. The original game (reviewed in **E**47) actually scored as highly in some Japanese magazines as *Bio-Hazard* (aka *Resident Evil*), which makes the sequel rather more of an event in the east than here.

The city in which the game takes place is known as East Edge, and borrows heavily from the Syd Mead-designed LA of 2019 seen in Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner'.

Images rendered using Alias Wavefront





Final Fantasy III

Final Fantasy VII may be the hottest ticket on the PlayStation at the moment, but its heritage is no less worthy of praise...







***Final Fantasy III*'s scenery represented 2D SNES graphics at their finest**





Its turned-based battles repelled many, but *FFIII* remains one of the richest and most expertly designed 16bit games ever conceived

SquareSoft's *Final Fantasy III*, released in the US in the September of 1994 but sadly never seeing the light of day as an official SNES title in the UK, was truly an epoch-making title.

Originally released in Japan as *Final Fantasy VI* (hence the numerical suffix given to the PlayStation instalment of the series – see page 84), *FFIII* represented the epitome of the Japanese interpretation of the RPG, with rich characterisation (despite the diminutive nature of the on-screen heroes and villains), fantastically detailed graphics, an excellently implemented battle system, a clutch of truly dazzling set pieces, and an engrossing plot.

Controlling a bunch of adventurers (many of whom would nip in and out of the party as the story evolved), players took off on a mission to bring down Kefka, the super-durable bad guy on a par with the Devil in terms of evil.

Offering some of the most varied situations ever seen in an RPG, *FFIII* was a unique title, a game whose fan base is probably the most ardent of any example ever. This alone is ample testament to what is one of the '90's true 16bit classics.

Publisher: SquareSoft	1994	No 21
Developer: In-house	SNES	

Namco Museum Encore

Namco has already played a major part in bringing the retro-gaming scene to the fore of gamers' consciousness. Now the company is preparing to release its PlayStation swansong...

To the delight of many long-serving arcade-goers' delight, Namco has provided them with a series of nostalgia hits in the form of the *Museum* instalments one to five. The company isn't finished yet, however, having recently announced *Namco Museum Encore*, a PlayStation compilation which brings together seven further Namco 'classics' on one CD.

Making up the septet are *Rolling Thunder*, *Dragon Spirit* (released as *Dragon Sabre* in Japan), *Rompers*, *Wonder Peach*, *Sky Kid*, *King and Balloons* and *Motos*.

The most well-known among these to western audiences will surely be *Rolling Thunder*, the seminal platform-based shooter from which Sega plundered ideas for its equally renowned *Shinobi*.

The title will be released in Japan in a limited-edition format (at ¥5,800 – approximately £35) which includes a box allowing owners to put together an entire collection of *Museum* products, including space for a memory card.

UK owners shouldn't expect such a luxury.

Format:	PlayStation
Publisher:	Namco
Developer:	In-house
Release:	October 30 (Japan)
Origin:	Japan







From left: *Rompers*, *Rolling Thunder*, and the special-edition package which allows *Museum* freaks to present their collection in grand style

(viewpoint)

EXPRESS YOURSELF IN EDGE – WRITE TO: LETTERS, EDGE, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH, BA1 2BW
(email: edge@futurenet.co.uk)

If you see Sid, tell him

I agree with almost everything Sid Meier said in the interview in **E**49 apart from one small point: I think it is a little unrealistic to assume that gameplay improvements alone will attract more people to videogames. The fact is that many people refuse to even touch computer games, and all the gameplay in the world would not change that in their eyes. Initially, it is often graphics that attract people to games and not gameplay. Gameplay is the factor that decides whether or not people continue to play the games, or dismiss them as a waste of time.

Graphical advances could turn out to be a bit of a double-edged sword, though, and I suppose could bring about more opposition to computer games. As violence becomes more graphic and realistic I think we can expect to see the tabloids take up the issue of videogame violence again.

To truly capture mass-market appeal, the games industry must shed the social stigma it has dragged around for so many years. The image of games being only for children and the terminally sad needs to be dispelled – Sony has made a good start by getting PlayStations into nightclubs, but if the company stops now it will only be so much wasted effort.

Sam Maxted,
via email

In some respects Sony considers the majority of its work done in terms of underground PlayStation marketing. With the console already occupying a prominent place in contemporary culture, it sees little point tackling the opinion-formers as they are, largely, already informed.

But **Edge** agrees with your points regarding mass-market consciousness and, particularly, graphical realism and its implications for on-screen violence. Rare's *GoldenEye*, for example, offers a tantalising glimpse of how videogame violence is no longer something requiring the complete suspension of belief. As technology continues to facilitate greater realism, it's inevitable that the spotlight will fall heavily upon videogaming with a tabloid outcry following.

Not a conversion convert

From the incessant letters of complaint you receive, it seems there is ubiquitous discontent with the substantial delays of PAL console software. I certainly concur with the view that such delays are ostensibly without purpose and can be seen to be an affront to millions of game players. Ownership of consoles such as the SNES, PlayStation and N64, however, has hardened me to this – I've grown accustomed to it.

What I cannot tolerate, however, is the manner in which, after this seemingly interminable wait, UK gamers are subjected to poor conversions of NTSC titles. I feel vehemently indignant when I recall the days when I paid £70 for a version of *SFII* that ran so slowly all of its excitement was lost. Or when I played PAL *Mario 64* and found the lack of speed made it ridiculously easy to acquire 120 stars within a few playing sessions.

The game in issue as I write this letter is *Tekken 3*. The PAL conversion turned *Tekken 2* into a vapid experience that paled when compared with its speedy arcade parent – I will be immensely disappointed if the *Tekken 3* conversion suffered the same fate. Surely Japanese developers should be made to realise that UK gamers cannot be treated in this deeply inequitable manner. We generate significant revenue for these firms so why can't we be given PAL conversions that are commensurate in speed and quality to their NTSC counterparts? Konami managed it with the PAL version of *ISS64*, so why can't other companies such as Namco and Capcom do likewise?

To **Edge** I say this: do not give your habitual response of 'look to the import market', as this means spending more, which should not be necessary. Instead I urge you to represent the wishes of people who maintain you (people who, despite what you may think, predominantly own PAL machines) a little more strongly by exerting pressure – from your position as an eminent publication – upon these companies to treat us more fairly. I have finally come to realise that we cannot rely on these companies and action must be taken or we will be fobbed off for eternity.

James Craig,
Formby

A few years ago this problem was far more evident and some Japanese companies (Sega, for example) have made considerable headway in tackling this problem, while others (Namco being arguably the most guilty party) have failed to address it at all with PAL PlayStation titles suffering unduly to the disappointment of European gamers. Conversely, Rare's efforts to maximise the potential of its PAL N64 software has been noted by Nintendo's internal Japanese development division and it is rumoured to be employing Rare's expertise on how best to convert from NTSC to PAL. **Edge**, more than any other magazine, has berated the PAL console software situation since it began and is considering appropriate measures that can be taken to improve the situation.

Bring on the crap...

For the current generation of consoles, much has been made of the software catalogues – ie Sony's 250 games, of which 200 are crap, and Nintendo's approach of quality over quantity.

Speaking as a neutral observer (I had a Mega Drive for the last two years of its life and only bought nine games, since I wasn't into sports sims or licensed platformers, which eventually came to dominate), what is the matter with choice? How much of the PlayStation's supposedly 'crap' back catalogue comprises Japanese RPGs or other game categories which would only be in a niche in the UK if they are represented at all? And wouldn't anyone who'd been burned once by a crap game have the sense to sift through it all by renting or borrowing and reading magazines? Result? Fewer crap games 18 months into the machine's life, since dross won't sell any more.

As for Nintendo, patronising mature game players with too much kiddy crap and trying to tell them that, despite the console being aimed at twentysomethings-and-above at launch, that those same twentysomethings are unable to pick and choose for themselves. So like naughty schoolkids they can have only what Nintendo tells them. This would have been enough to make me go and buy a different console altogether, technical superiority or not. Not to mention dumping all the best games out at Christmas and letting the console gather dust over the rest of the year with only a few A-list titles per quarter – a trend my adopted platform, the PC, has now followed.

Given the cost of the cartridges, it's no longer the case that the N64 is magically cheaper – add up the cost of the console (even with discount), the controllers, memory cards, any add-ons from thirdparties, and finally ten new games at £70 a throw over two years, and... yes, you do reach a grand and beyond, don't you? The fact that no PC game stays over £30 for more than a fortnight after release will be why I'll never go back to consoles. And anyone who wants to write in and disagree, please grab a calculator and tell me how much you've spent in total first – on ALL the console gear you've ever bought as new.

Kenneth Henry,
address withheld

As you say, there's nothing wrong with choice. N64 owners looking to buy a decent *Ridge Racer*-style driving game or a *Tekken*-style fighting game will struggle, which is a dismal situation considering that these are the two most popular console genres. But it's still paradoxical that the 64bit machine's tiny catalogue (including import titles, naturally) contains more inspired and innovative software than the entire Sony line-up. And this quality-versus-quantity trade-off looks set to continue for the foreseeable future.

Regarding the PC, while its software may be more affordable, the titles outside of its main genres (simulations, strategy games and *Quake* clones for the more cynically inclined) can rarely hold a candle to seminal gaming experiences such as *Mario 64*, *GoldenEye*, *Tekken 2* and *Final Fantasy VII*.

Grinding an axe on the PC

Happy birthday. And thanks to Patrick S Cowan [E50] for the view of stopping the format-versus-format arguments – you could put the icing on the 50th birthday cake by not printing any more of them. I have more of an axe to grind with my own system – a PC – than with any console, if only because the simple things it would take to make a solid game system take years to change. ▶

In the first place I'm talking about a second hard-wired joystick port by default without the need for extra cards or Y-cables. If the feature has always been there, why not just mount the accompanying port on the motherboard (as Game Port 2 and most manufacturers will have a port on their soundcard) and bang, nearly instant multiplayer action on the same PC dependent upon the game, with no fuss? Furthermore, if Direct X 5 hasn't already taken care of complex controllers, increase the button allowance to four rather than two, without both ports clashing with each other. Intel is now one of the biggest motherboard players – why not place it in the Pentium II boards onwards? As far as I'm concerned this is the biggest *easily solveable* bottleneck blocking the PC's progress – but only as long as a company as dominant as Intel started the trend – then other major board makers would have no excuse for not following suit, if their boards could compete on performance yet sported the same features. If Thrustmaster's ACM game card already does all this I stand corrected – but that only takes care of me now, for an extra cost. For the next PC I'd rather not have to bother (and shell out extra for) bolting on all kinds of extras to get it to do what a console does for between a tenth and a quarter of the cost.

Graphics cards? That's a whole other letter.

Kenneth Henry, address withheld

It's a constant source of amusement to **Edge** how, for all their sophistication, PC games often still require the player to be hunched over the keyboard like a concert pianist. The lack of an extra controller port coupled with the fact that the vast majority of PC games subscribe to the use of the mouse alone (or, increasingly, a mouse/ keyboard combo) naturally poses design constraints upon software. Anyone who has experienced the N64 controller in titles such as *Turok* or *GoldenEye* (or the PlayStation's versatile controller for that matter) will appreciate that unless Intel can offer the same level of flexibility for PC developers the format will remain at a disadvantage.

Smug in the knowledge

After reading the interview with Ken Kutaragi in **E**50, it would seem to me that the PlayStation is the undisputed winner of the next generation battle so far. Thus I can remain smug in the knowledge that I bought the right machine.

The next decision has already been made for me – after the success of the PlayStation concept (Sony created more than a machine here, let's be honest), come 1999 the PlayStation 2 will be the machine top of my shopping list. How much I look forward to *Resident Evil 3*, *Tomb Raider 3* and *Rice/Rake/Rune Racer* from Namco...

And yet I worry. Why do I get the dreadful feeling Sega knows something that Sony doesn't? Why do I get the impression that Sega won't be making the same mistake twice? What is it that tells me Sega has something special up its sleeves? Paranoia, perhaps...

James Holloway, via email

Maybe. It's a shame that your own wish list will keep softcos smug in the knowledge that sequels are all people care about, though.

Sweeping up 'utter rubbish'

I've been reading **Edge** since issue 1, and never have I read such utter rubbish as Phil Ford's letter in **E**49. I am indeed an N64 owner (NTSC import) and have been for 14 months. I have eight games, and, with the exception of one, consider them all to be classics (*Mario 64*, *Turok*, *Star Fox* and *Wave Race*, for example) and whose longevity far outweighs that of any Playstation title, as many ex-Sony owners will agree.

I used to own a Playstation – *Ridge Racer* was indeed a classic, as too was *Tekken* and two or three other titles. But after eight months I was bored with it and as a result sold it. Mysteriously many of my friends have also owned and sold their PlayStations and then opted for N64s. Not one has been disappointed.

Why on earth did Phil Ford buy an N64? After all, Mario has existed for over a decade and has always been 'eye candy' in all his glories. Mario represents Nintendo. Adding to that, did *Turok* become monotonous for him as it represented too much of a challenge? When have games such as *PilotWings*, *Turok* and *Goldeneye*, to name just three, been marketed at under-five-year-olds? Wake up! Look and play the difference in quality between the two systems. The N64 has indeed far fewer titles, but then how many different versions of *Ridge Racer* and *Tekken* do you want to play?

As for poor software, I agree the N64 has suffered from several below standard titles, but there are tens if not hundreds of poor Playstation titles for every lacking N64 release. Please go ahead and bin your N64, and buy a Playstation, it's your decision – one which you will regret. As for your two choices, please opt for living in Tokyo, thus sparing **Edge** readers the irrelevant thoughts of a 34-year-old who is willing to trade the future for the past.

Robert Gage, Cwmbran, South Wales

Missing the point

Loved your 'Did I really say that?' segments in **Edge** 50. It's incredible how wrong some people can get it, isn't it? Could I add one more to the list, though: 'Some games have everything in their favour yet ultimately fail to live up to expectations.' (*C&C* review, **E**25.) Hee hee hee...

Orion, via email

Eh? As the review pointed out, *C&C* is essentially a reworking of *Dune II* and failed to live up to **Edge**'s expectations. So what's your point?

(QandA)

SEND QUESTIONS TO Q&A, **EDGE**, 30 MONMOUTH STREET, BATH, BA1 2BW.

Q Can you tell me when SCEE will get around to releasing the cable that will allow me to route the sound from my 'new' PlayStation through my stereo while using an RFU TV? When I bought it I didn't know the connections had been changed. The Sony Centre I bought it from claims they didn't know at the time either (I was told they opened one and found it was different internally), and that the cable I need exists but that they've never seen it.

The situation is made even more infuriating by the fact that there are shops still selling 'old' PlayStations, for which the necessary wires (and sensibly priced thirdparty alternatives) are already available.

Jon Harris, via email

A Peripheral specialist Fire International has released a cable that solves this problem but it seems that Sony hasn't prepared for its own cost-cutting exercises. No doubt an official lead will appear, but try contacting Fire (01302 325225) for more details of its own solution.

Q Does the new analogue Sony controller work, in its analogue mode, with old analogue-compatible games? In other words, is it compatible with NegCon or Mad Catz? If not, do you have any news of re-releases of old classics, such as *Ridge Racer*, for the new pad?

Robert Hagenström, via email

A To be honest, the analogue-controller situation is currently a bit of a mess. Most games that are compatible with the NegCon and the Mad Katz steering wheel do not work with the analogue pad. Games need to be programmed specifically for the new pad and soon (so Sony claims) all new games will be compatible.

Q Is Sony not allowing thirdparties to produce multitaps for the PlayStation, or are there not enough multiplayer games to justify such a product? Is this the reason why Sony can charge a hefty £30 for the official multitap?

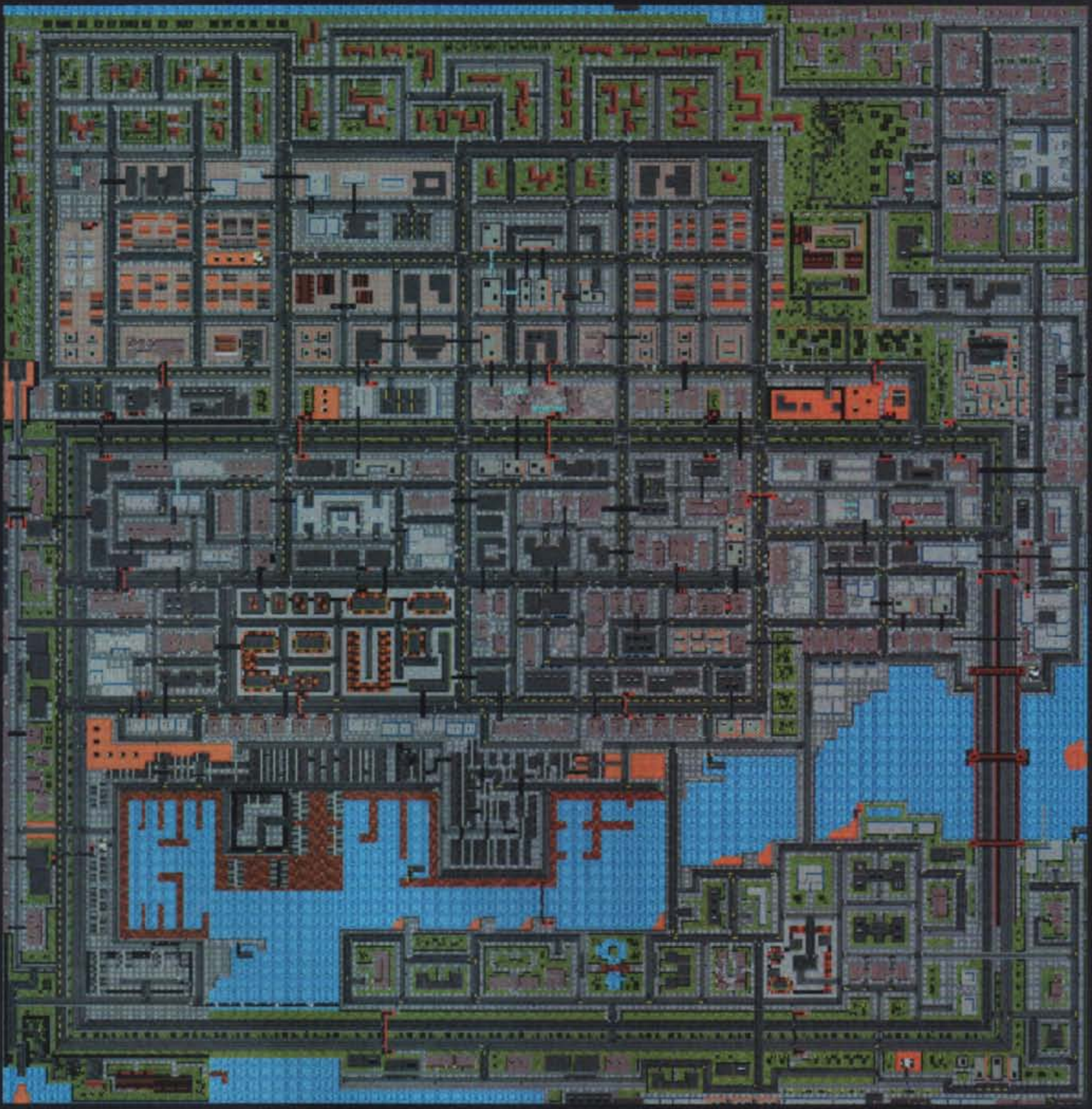
Ken Wong, via email

A There are no thirdparty multitaps available as far as **Edge** is aware, but this is more likely to be a case of a lack of multiplayer software than any 'directive' from Sony.

Q How much will the Nintendo 64 Action Replay cost, and when will it be released in the UK?

Rob Lavender, via email

A It should be available now, priced at around £55. **Edge** will take a closer look at the device next month.



At a time when the world's videogame development forces appear intent on borrowing heavily from each other's work, with new clones of *Quake*, *Command & Conquer*, and *Super Mario 64* appearing at a rapid rate, DMA's *Grand Theft Auto* is a breath of fresh air. With a top-viewed perspective, full-on action and controversial content, it's a title destined for a vast amount of attention. The first review of the game will appear in next month's **Edge**.

Issue 52 will also feature the third free **Edge Interactive** preview CD.

issue fifty-two

on sale November 3



PREVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

DIDDY KONG RACING (N64)

GRAN TURISMO (PLAYSTATION)

BURNING RANGERS (SATURN)

HALF-LIFE (PC)

BARRAGE (PC)

TOP GEAR RALLY (N64)

SHINING FORCE 3 (SATURN)

VIRTUAL HIRYU NO KEN (N64)

REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE

CASTLEVANIA (PLAYSTATION)

FINAL FANTASY VII (PLAYSTATION)

RAPID RACER (PLAYSTATION)

HEXEN II (PC)

G-POLICE (PLAYSTATION)

DARK REIGN (PC)

ROCKMAN X4 (PLAYSTATION)

DUKE NUKEM (SATURN)

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